BERNHARDT

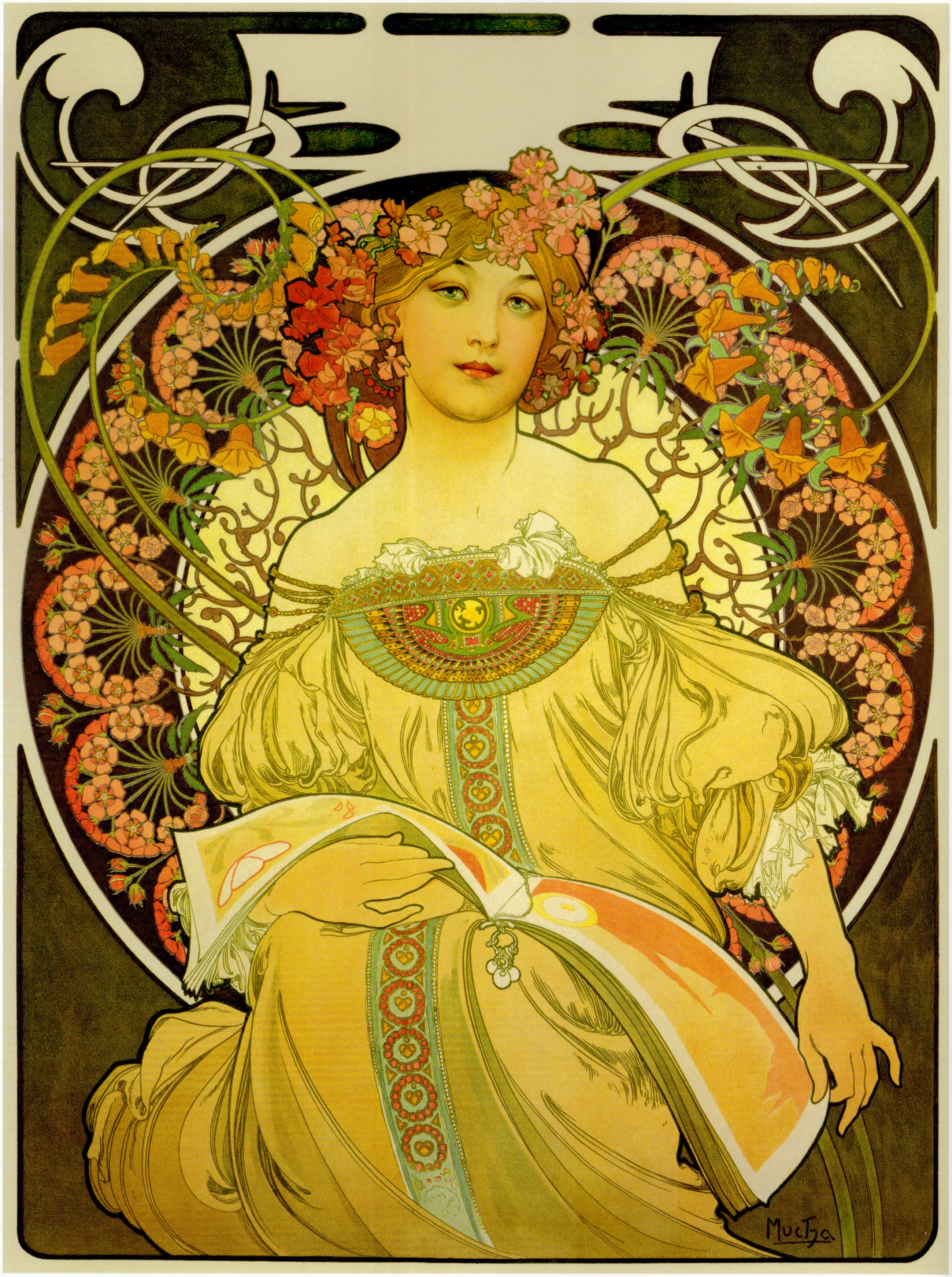
Tomoko Sato

Alphonse Mucha

1860–1939

The Artist as Visionary

TASCHEN


Mucha

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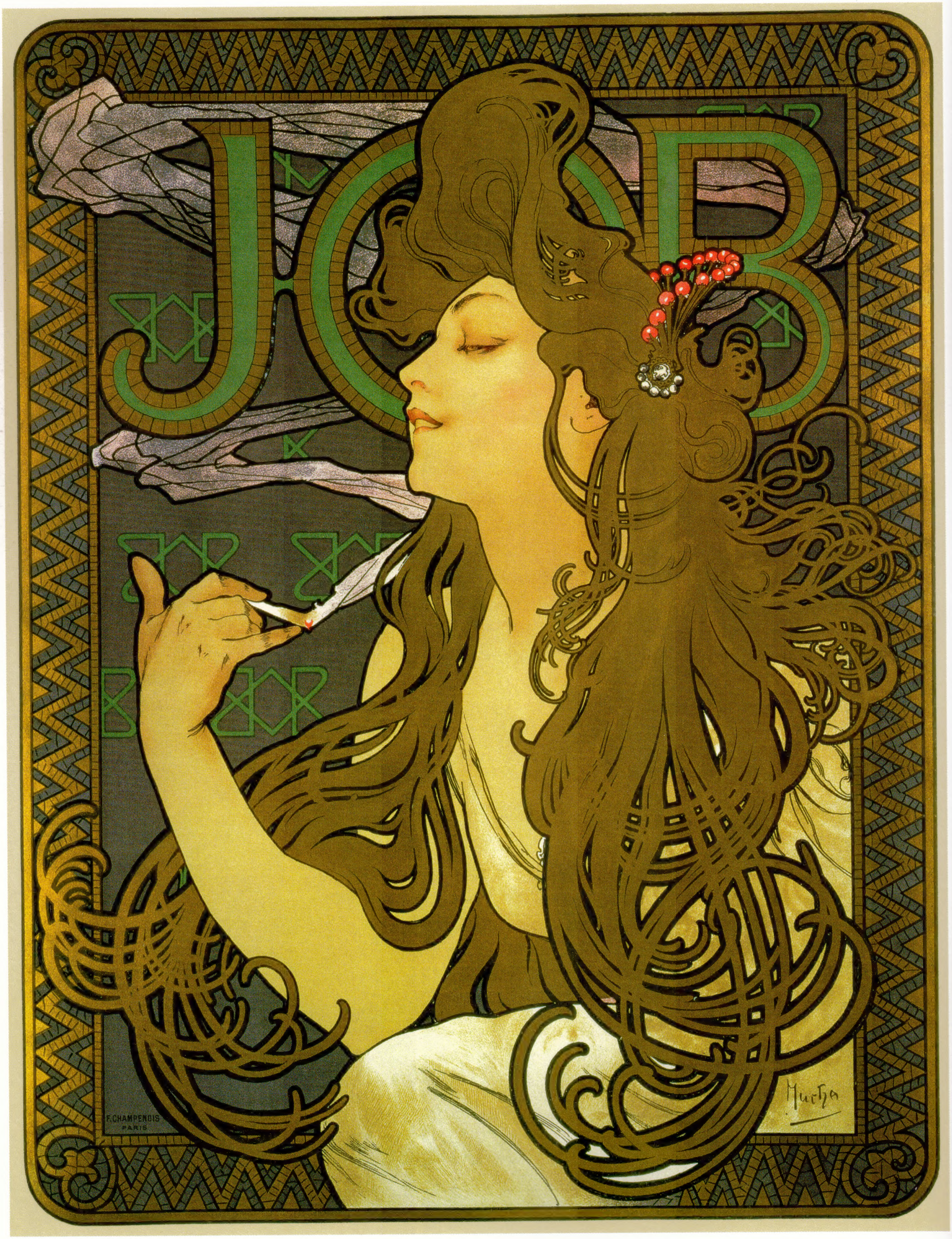
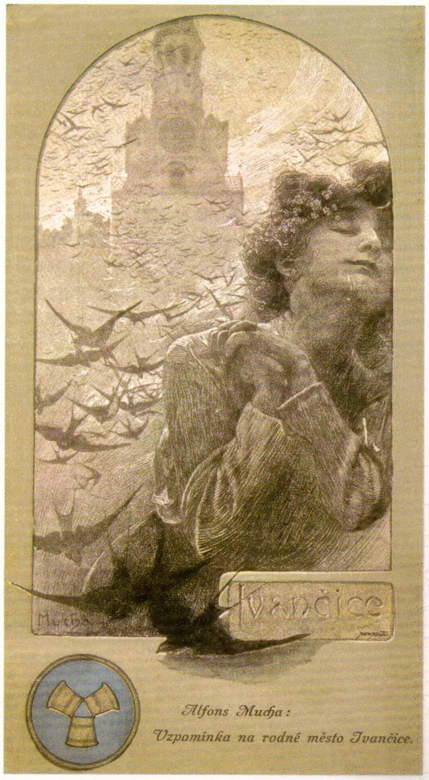

JOB
F. CHAMPENOIS
PARIS
Mucha

Moravia – the Beginning of a Journey

In the spring of 1904, Alphonse Mucha wrote to his family in Moravia shortly after his first transatlantic crossing to New York: "You must have been very surprised by my decision to come to America, perhaps even amazed. But in fact I had been preparing to come [here] for some time. It had become clear to me that I would never have time to do the things I wanted to do if I did not get away from the treadmill of Paris. I would be constantly bound to publishers and their whims … [In America] I don't expect to find wealth, comfort or fame for myself, only the opportunity to do some more useful work." Mucha was then at the height of his fame as one of the most sought-after artists in the French capital, but at the age of 43 he abandoned his worldly success in order to pursue his ideal. Five years after his first trip to America, this 'more useful work' was to develop into an ambitious project to create a cycle of 20 monumental paintings depicting the history of all the Slavic peoples, which we know today as *The Slav Epic* (1912–26). In 1928, on the 10th anniversary of the birth of his nation, Czechoslovakia, Mucha presented *The Slav Epic* to the city of Prague as a monument to inspire the spiritual unity of the Slavs and the peace of mankind. Mucha considered the work his most significant accomplishment as an artist and as a man.

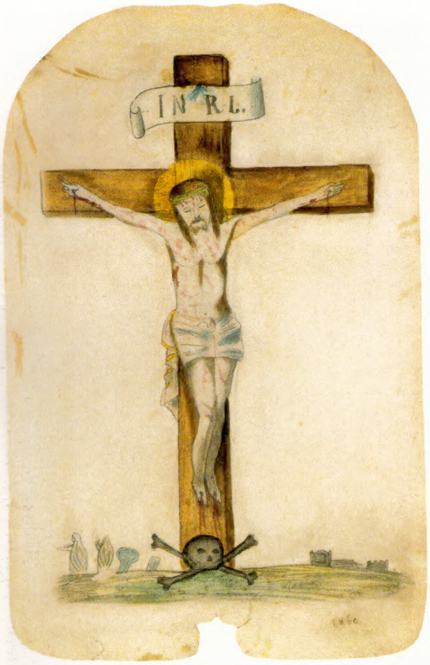
Although Mucha is best known as a master of Art Nouveau, a close study of his life and work reveals a more complex side to the artist, especially as a socially committed thinker. He was a nationalist, a believer in Pan-Slavism, a Masonic reformer and a pacifist. For Mucha, art was a means to communicate his political and philosophical visions to the wider public, rather than to experiment with new doctrines and styles. The task of this volume is to examine the path of Mucha's life and to understand how his life shaped the art and the ideas behind his works.

Alphonse (or Alfons in Czech) Maria Mucha was born on July 24, 1860, in Ivančice, a small town in southern Moravia, then one of the Slavic provinces of the Austrian Empire. He was the fourth child of Ondřej Mucha (1825–1891), a court usher, and the first child of Amálie (*née* Malá, 1822–1880), a miller's daughter from Budišov, and Ondřej's second wife. Despite her humble origins, Amálie was unusually well read and before her marriage she had been the governess to an aristocratic family in Vienna. Mucha's birth was soon followed by the arrival of his two sisters, Anna and Anděla, and the large family lived in a small residential quarter, sharing the same old stone building with the district jail and adjoining the courthouse.


Ivančice
Mucha
Alfons Mucha:
Vzpominka na rodné město Ivančice.

***Memory of Ivančice*,** 1903
Reproduced as the postcard
published in Ivančice, 1909
Postcard, colour lithograph,
14 x 9 cm / 5½ x 3½ in.

***JOB*,** 1896
Colour lithograph,
66.7 x 46.4 cm / 26¼ x 18¼ in.



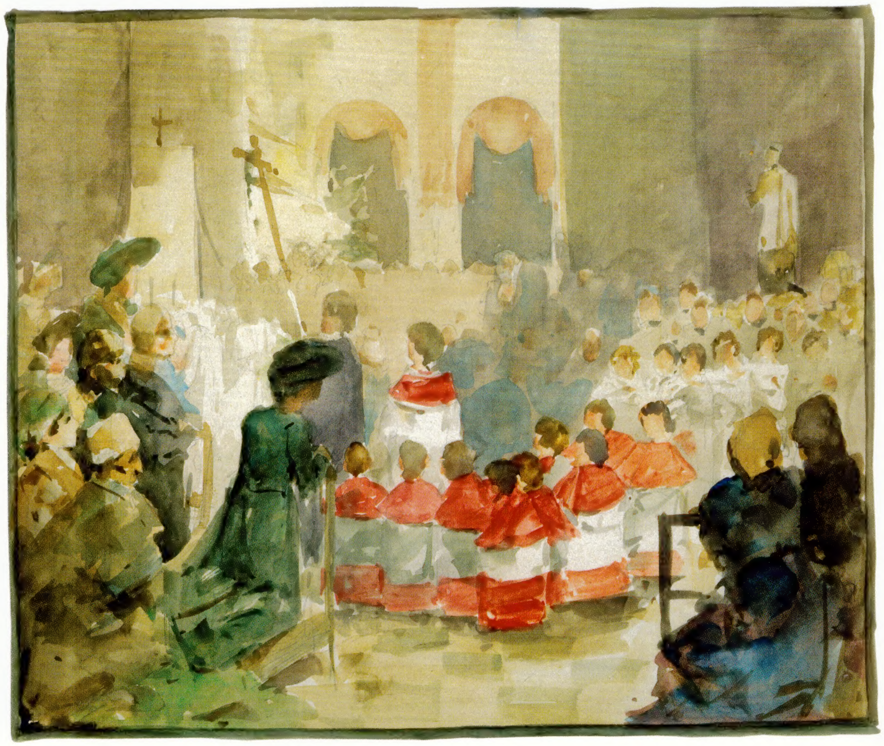
Crucifixion (detail), *c.* 1868
Pencil, crayon and watercolour on paper,
37 x 23.5 cm / 14⅝ x 9¼ in.

This is one of Mucha's earliest known works, made when he was about eight years old. From early childhood, the influence of the Catholic Church, and especially its architectural beauty, music and mystic atmosphere, had a great impact on Mucha's sensibilities.

Ivančice was a quiet market town located approximately 20 km southwest of the Moravian capital, Brno. Although its history was shrouded in war, foreign invasion and religious strife – like many other towns in Central Europe – at one time it was an important centre of Czech learning. During the Reformation, the Unity of the Brethren, a religious sect advocating the Hussite movement, founded a school and their main printing workshop at Ivančice and it was here that they initiated the translation of the New Testament from the original Greek into the Czech language. Known as the *Bible of Kralice* (the printing was done in the nearby village of Kralice and published 1579–93), this was to become the most widely used Czech bible translation. Mucha later celebrated this achievement in one of his *Slav Epic* paintings, *The Printing of the Bible of Kralice* (1914).

Such Czech learning, however, declined under Habsburg rule, which began in 1620 with the victory of the Catholic Habsburg armies over the Protestant Czechs at the Battle of White Mountain (Bílá Hora) near Prague. Catholicism duly became the state religion, whilst the Czech language, indigenous religion and culture were suppressed through Germanisation. By the late 18th century, the Czech language had been reduced to no more than a folk dialect. A struggle for national survival then began, and this effort, the Czech National Revival movement, established to restore the Czech language, culture and national identity, reached its peak in the 1860s.

During the same period, the Austrian authority's hold over its vast, multinational territory was weakening. In 1866, Austria was defeated by Prussia in the Austro-Prussian War and lost its German states. Before Austria's subsequent transformation into the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867, the immediate impact of the war was felt even in Ivančice. During the summer of 1866, the town was swarming with retreating Austrian soldiers and then occupied by the victorious Prussian army for two months. The small community of Ivančice struggled to feed these more than 58,000 men and 14,000 horses. To six-year-old Mucha,



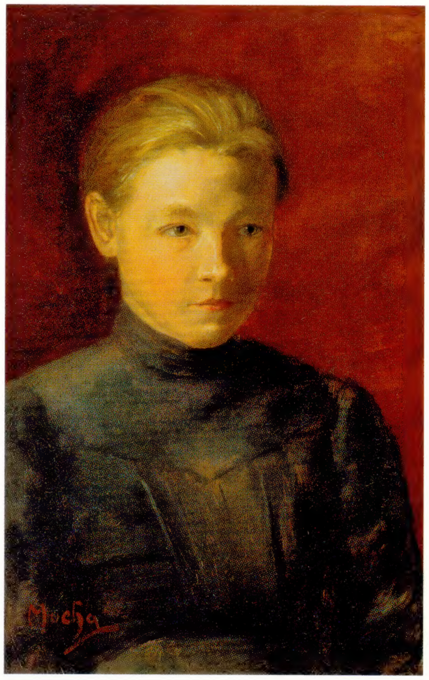
Choirboys at the Petrov Church, Brno (detail), 1905
Watercolour on card,
24 x 23.7 cm / 9½ x 9⅜ in.

the splendid display of the Prussian soldiers in their colourful uniforms looked like a scene from heroic ancient wars. However, when a cholera epidemic broke out, they turned into emaciated, yellowish corpses; the bodies were thrown in scores into mass graves outside the town. This experience had a lasting impact on Mucha and probably shaped his view of death and of the paradox of war, as depicted in works such as *War* (1916) and *The Slav Epic: After the Battle of Grunwald* (1924).

From a young age Mucha was keenly aware of life around him. "As a child I was continuously preoccupied with observing, even though I might have looked [as though I were] just gazing into a void", he wrote later. From flowers, a neighbour's dog, horses and monkeys to decorative patterns on local potters' wares and house decorators' paintings, objects and activities alike caught his eye. Fascinated by the way they looked and worked, he "faithfully noted everything that was out of the ordinary, whether by drawing or painting, or merely by being conscious of it." Being equipped with such a curious mind and a passion for drawing even before he could walk, he grew up to become an outstanding draughtsman. His portraits, caricatures and fantasy drawings impressed his schoolmates and teachers, and a local shopkeeper was so taken by Mucha's drawing that he often supplied the Muchas with free paper, even though it was a luxury in the small town without a railway.

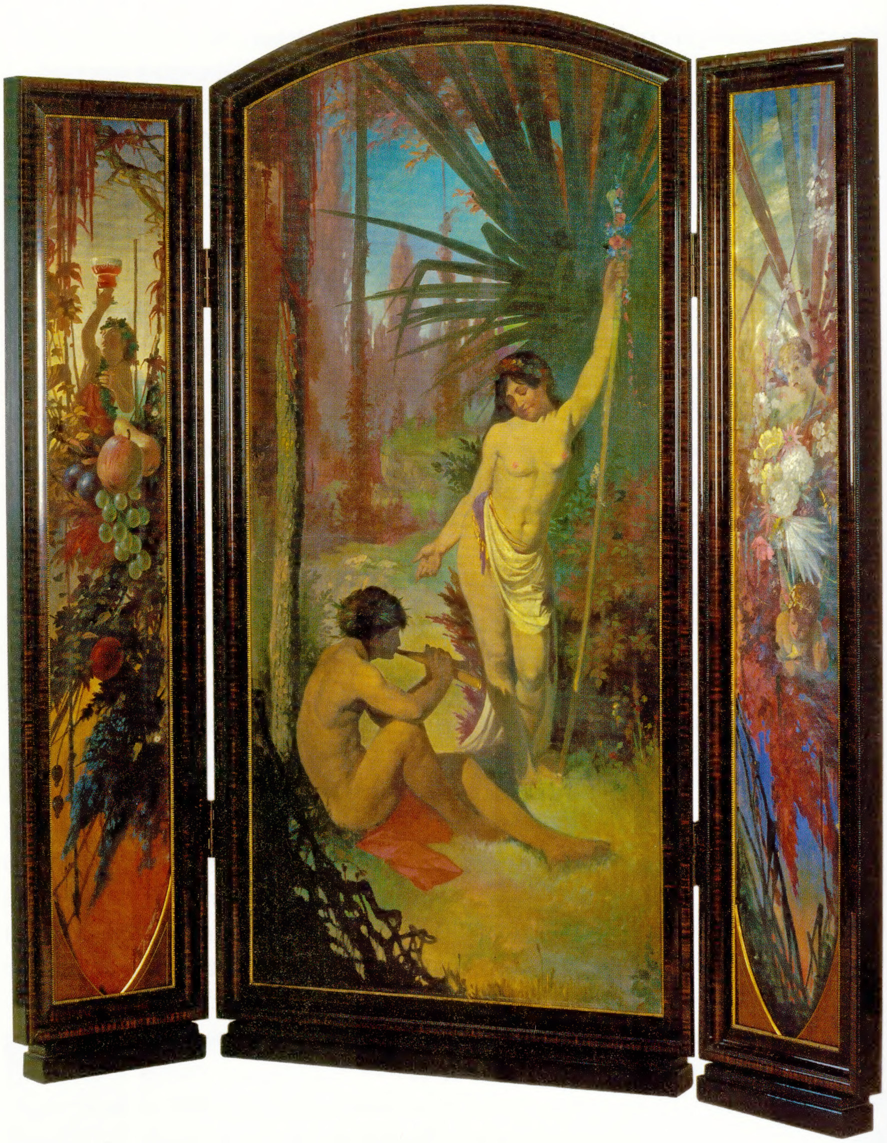
In his formative years, religion played a considerable part in Mucha's life. His mother Amálie was a devout Catholic and young Mucha spent many years as an acolyte and choirboy at the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Ivančice. Decades later in Paris, for the drawing *Memory of Ivančice* (p. 7), Mucha used the image of the church's Gothic tower as a metaphor for his love and longing for home and thenceforth it became a recurring motif in his work. When he was 11, his singing ability enabled Mucha to join the choir of the prestigious Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Brno as a choral scholar. With this scholarship he was also able to receive higher education at the Slovanské Gymnasium in the city. The various impressions of the church from his religious upbringing – the grand edifice of a cathedral, its frescoes, statues, ornaments, burning candles, the intoxicating fragrance of incense and flowers, bells, singing and music – stayed with him throughout his life. Mucha wrote later: "For me, the notions of painting, going to church, and music are so closely knit that often I cannot decide whether I like church for its music or music for its place in the mystery which it accompanies."

Furthermore, the intensely patriotic environment created by the Czech National Revival movement nurtured adolescent Mucha's nationalist consciousness. As a student in Brno he witnessed a revived interest in Moravian folk art and culture among the intellectuals and students who opposed the influence from Vienna. He also met the composer Leoš Janáček (1854–1928), who was then deputy choirmaster at St. Thomas's Abbey, and a future leading exponent of nationalist expression in music. The number of Czech-language publications had been increasing since the 1860s, informing the latest political thinking and cultural trends in Prague, Brno and other regional centres. Works by eminent artists and musicians such as Josef Mánes (1820–1871) and Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884) were exemplifying how art could serve the nation through its power of inspiration. The highly influential Sokol movement was now spreading to Moravia and other regions, promoting nationalist ideology through physical and moral training. When he returned to Ivančice in 1877, Mucha had numerous opportunities to be involved in patriotic activities, joining the Sokol, using his artistic skills to



Portrait of Mucha's Sister Anna, *c.* 1885
Oil on canvas, 55 x 34.5 cm / 21⅝ x 13⅝ in.

This realist-style portrait of his sister, Anna, was painted while Mucha was a student in Munich. Among his family he was particularly close to her and the two of them regularly exchanged letters. In 1885 Anna married Mucha's friend Filip Kuber, a Czech patriot, writer and publisher; Mucha made many illustrations for Kuber's satirical magazines.



Screen for the Emmahof Castle, Mikulov, *c.* 1883–84
Oil on canvas, overall dimensions of the triptych: 180 x 161 cm / 71 x 63½ in.
Brno, Moravian Gallery

design flyers and decorate halls for political events, while also being involved in local amateur theatre and working as a stenographer at the district court.

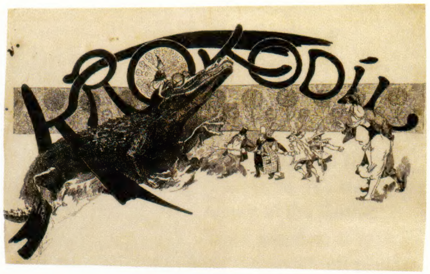
In the cultural environment of Moravia in the 1870s, it was natural for Mucha to perceive art as a means to respond to the nation's needs. In the autumn of 1878 he applied to the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague on the advice of Josef Zelený (1824–1886), a painter and Mucha's drawing teacher during his student days in Brno. Unfortunately, his application was unsuccessful and he was advised to find "a different career" by the Art Academy. A year later, however, a newspaper advertisement brought him a new chance: Kautsky-Brioschi-Burghardt, a theatre-set company in Vienna, was seeking a painter for its workshop. Mucha immediately responded to the advertisement and was offered a job as an apprentice scene painter. At the age of 19, Mucha set off for the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with a sense of mission for the future of his homeland.

Mucha spent almost two years in Vienna. A centre of high culture and a world capital of music, the city offered him great opportunities to explore beautiful churches, museums, art galleries, concert halls and, above all, theatres, thanks to the free tickets supplied by the company he worked for. In his spare time he could take evening art-classes and study the latest trends, especially the style of Hans Makart (1840–1884), the most fashionable painter in the Viennese art world. The 'Makartstil', which typically involved large, sumptuously coloured historical or allegorical paintings in complex compositions incorporating beautiful women, was highly influential among the academic artists and high society of Vienna. During this period, Mucha also began to take photographs with a borrowed camera, experimenting with this new medium of visual expression. He was to continue with photography throughout his life and it became an important part of his creative process. Unfortunately, however, his first taste of cosmopolitan life was short-lived. On December 8, 1881, a major fire broke out at the Ringtheater, killing almost 400 people and destroying the building. This theatre was the largest customer of Mucha's employers and the consequent loss of business caused him to lose his job.

For a while Mucha stayed in Vienna, until his savings were reduced to only five florins. He then decided to try his luck as an artist rather than going home straight away. Taking a train from the Franz Josef Station and going as far north as his remaining money would take him, he got off at Mikulov, a picturesque Moravian town on the border with Austria. Luck was on his side, and soon Mucha began to earn a reputation in this small town as a portrait painter, decorator and lettering designer for tombstones. His work caught the attention of Count Eduard Khuen-Belasi (1847–1896), a local landlord, which resulted in his commissioning Mucha to paint a series of frescoes for his residence, Emmahof Castle, and later his ancestral home in the Tyrol, Gandegg Castle, where his younger brother Count Egon (1849–1909) lived. The brothers were so impressed by Mucha's talent that they became his patrons, subsequently enabling him to receive formal art training in Munich and Paris.

The Counts' patronage provided Mucha not only with financial security but also the cultural and intellectual environment that contributed to the development of his artistic skills and consciousness as a professional artist. At Emmahof he was able to enjoy an elegant lifestyle and unlimited access to Count Eduard's library, where he could study Old Master paintings as well as drawings and illustrations by modern French artists such as Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), Ernest Meissonier (1815–1891), Charles-François Daubigny (1817–1878) and Gustave Doré (1832–1883). Count Eduard also became Mucha's "great moral authority" and introduced him to the idea of Freemasonry, sowing the seeds of Mucha's future spiritualism. Furthermore, Count Egon was himself an amateur painter. He often took Mucha painting '*en plein air*' in the Tyrolean Mountains and travelled with him to northern Italy, exposing him to artistic heritage in Venice, Florence, Bologna and Milan. Moreover, Count Egon decided to send Mucha to Munich, having been prompted by his old friend and Munich painter Wilhelm Kray (1828–1889), who had seen Mucha's work at Gandegg.

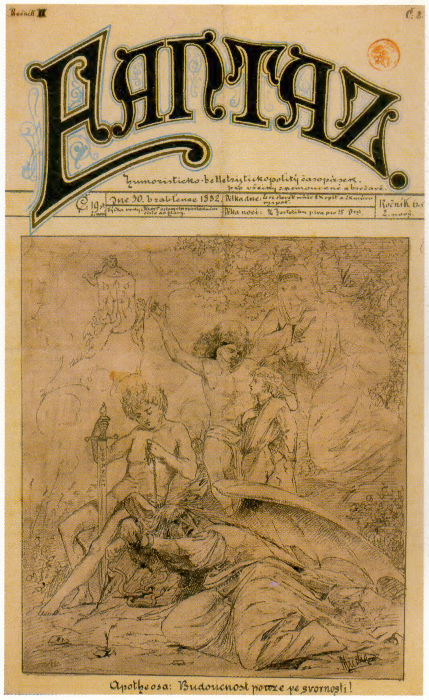
Mucha entered the Academy of Fine Arts (originally the Royal Academy of Fine Arts) in Munich in September 1885. One of the oldest and most prestigious art academies in Germany, the school attracted talented young artists from throughout the Habsburg territories as well as the new German Empire. During his two-year stay, Mucha formed lasting friendships with many Slavic students including his fellow Czechs Joža Uprka (1861–1940), Luděk Marold (1865–1898) and Karel Mašek (1865–1927), as well as the Russians Leonid Pasternak (1862–1945) and David Widhopff (1867–1933). With his nationalistic enthusiasm, Mucha became a guiding light for the Czech art students' club Škréta, named after the prominent Czech Baroque painter Karel Škréta (1610–1674). When

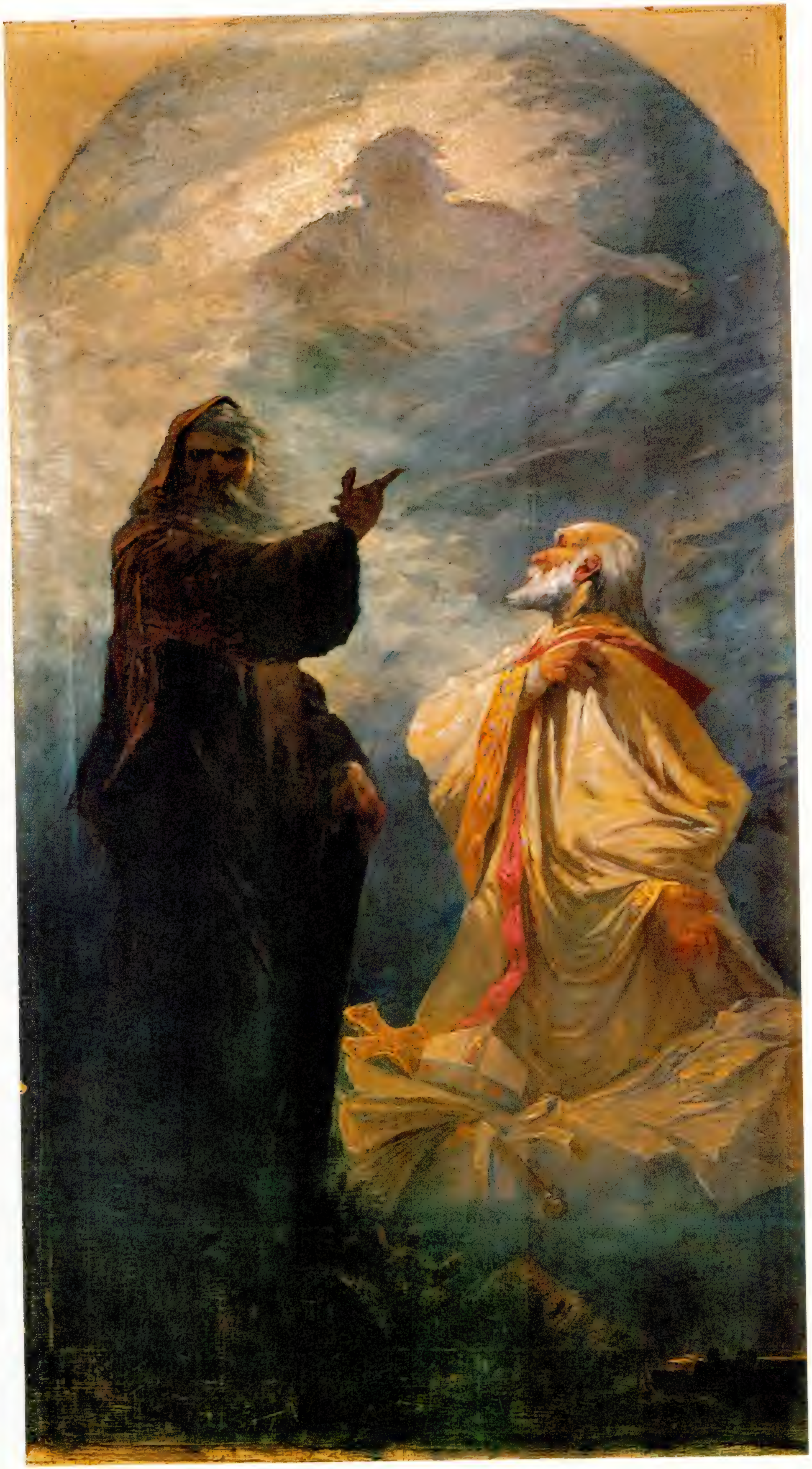


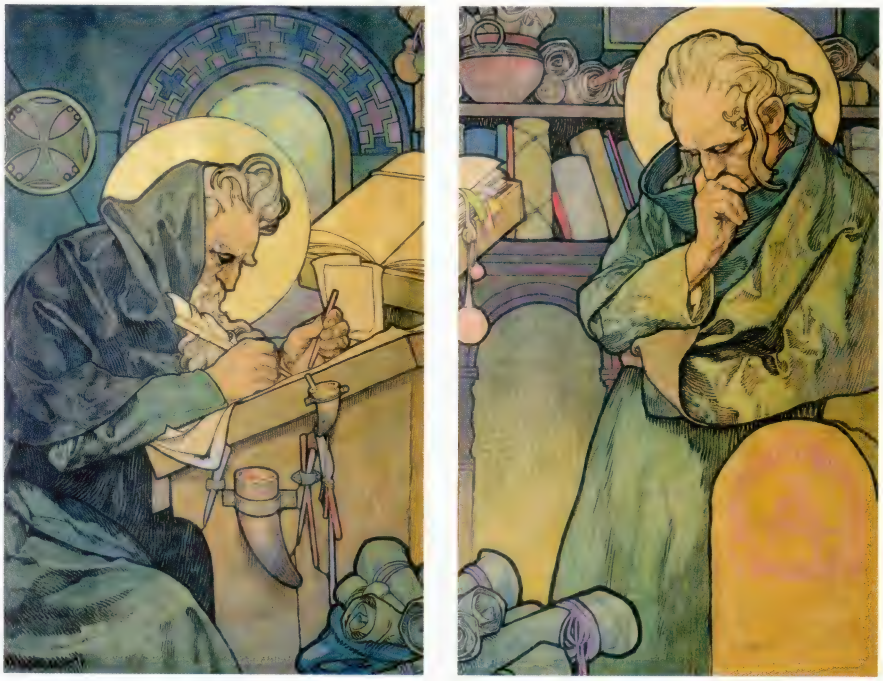
Krokodíl, 1885
Design for the heading of the magazine cover
Pen and ink on card, 20 x 32 cm / 7⅞ x 12⅝ in.

A principal contributor to *Krokodíl* and various other magazines published by Filip Kuber, Mucha was bombarded with his brother-in-law's requests for illustrations: "Dear Friend, I am writing to you again and hope you don't mind … The illustrations for *Krokodíl* and *Slon* which you sent me are already at the printer's." Mucha's design here demonstrates his innovative lettering style, an element that was to become fully developed with his poster designs in Paris.

Fantaz, 1882
Design for the magazine cover
Ink and watercolour on paper,
46 x 28.8 cm / 18⅛ x 11⅜ in.


Ročník II
Č: 2.
FANTAZ.
humoristicko-belletristicko-politický časopísek.
Dne 30. brablence 1882
Délka dne:
Délka noci:
Ročník 6.
Apotheosa: Budoucnost pouze ve svornosti!





Writing Methodius and Philosopher Cyril, 1931
Studies for the stained-glass window in
St. Vitus Cathedral, Prague
Pencil, ink and watercolour on paper,
125 x 160 cm / 49 x 63 in.

Mucha's stained-glass window, funded by the Slavia Insurance Bank (see pp. 74, 75), was made in 1931, following completion of the Gothic reconstruction work of the Cathedral in 1929. This design was made for the upper left panels of the window, portraying Methodius and Cyril as a scholar and thinker respectively.

Mucha was elected its president, he expanded the membership to all other Slavs studying in the city. Members published their drawings in the club's journal, *The Palette*, as well as other Munich magazines and newspapers. Mucha also stayed in close touch with his homeland, regularly contributing illustrations and designs to the satirical political magazines *Fantaz* (p. 11 bottom), *Slon* and *Krokodíl* (p. 11 top), all founded by his brother-in-law Filip Kuber (1858–1913).

Not many works are known from Mucha's Munich years but his large altarpiece, *Saints Cyril and Methodius* (p. 12), is particularly noteworthy among the surviving paintings from this period. The painting was produced for the Church of St. John of Nepomuk at Pisek, a small town in North Dakota founded by Czech settlers in America around 1880. Mucha's relatives were among these settlers and they arranged for him to produce the work. Cyril and Methodius were ninth-century Byzantine missionaries and Czech patron saints who had spread Christianity among the Czechs and other Slavs. Mucha was to revisit this subject later in one of the *Slav Epic* paintings, *The Introduction of the Slavonic Liturgy* (pp. 76, 82 top), and in the design for the stained-glass window in St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague (above). In the altarpiece he portrayed the saints in the Classical pyramidal composition, combined with bold foreshortening as well as rich colours and symbolism, clearly demonstrating his growth as a skilled academic painter. Mucha was now ready to take the next step in his journey. He chose Paris as his next destination.

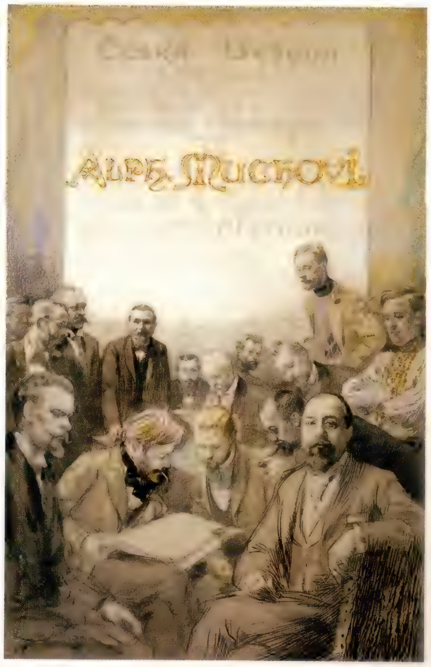
Saints Cyril and Methodius, 1886
Design for altarpiece in the Church of St. John of Nepomuk in Pisek, North Dakota
Oil on canvas, 85 x 45.5 cm / 33½ x 18 in.
Czech Republic, private collection

The Bohemian in Paris

In the autumn of 1887, Mucha arrived in Paris with his friend from the Munich Academy, Karel Mašek. As the heart of a rapidly expanding colonial empire, Paris was going through an economic boom, and its prosperity and confidence made the city the greatest capital of the arts in Europe, attracting young artists and students from every corner of the world. During this period, it also became common among Czech art students to study in Paris after training in Munich. On the first day of their arrival, Mucha and Mašek registered at the Académie Julian, where they were reunited with their friends from Munich, Luděk Marold and David Widhopff.

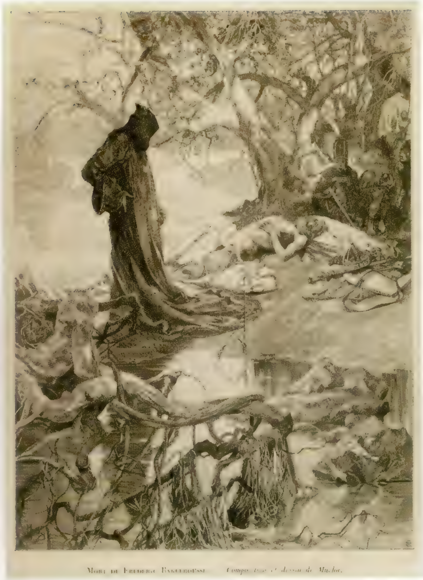
Located in the Passage des Panoramas off the Boulevard Montmartre, the Académie Julian was a private art school founded in 1868 by the artist Rodolphe Julian (1839–1907) as an alternative training centre to the government-sanctioned École des Beaux-Arts. With inexpensive tuition fees (an important factor for Mucha), tutors of a high calibre and an unconventional teaching policy which admitted female students who were then allowed to draw from nude male models, the school was popular with foreign students as well as young avant-garde French artists. Mucha's tutors included Jules Joseph Lefebvre (1836–1911) and Jean-Paul Laurens (1838–1921), both also professors at the École des Beaux-Arts and highly regarded art educators. Combined with Mucha's earlier influence by Makart, Lefebvre's allegorical compositions celebrating feminine beauty and Laurens's large historical paintings in theatrical settings are very likely to have contributed to the artistic direction he would take in later years. In addition, the Académie Julian provided Mucha with a new set of friends, especially Paul Sérusier (1864–1927) and his circle, who subsequently founded Les Nabis. As an aspiring 'thinking artist' with an ambition to work for his homeland using his art, Mucha was encouraged by their view of painting as a visual means to express the artist's private vision rather than to pursue art for art's sake. Furthermore, Mucha saw a parallel between his own nationalist approach to the use of art and their admiration of the folk traditions and rustic life in the Brittany village of Pont-Aven, and its inspirational source for their artistic creation.

At the time of Mucha's arrival, Paris was undergoing a radical transformation. The modernisation of the city, which had begun during the Second Empire (1852–70), continued under the Third Republic from 1870 onwards, materialising most vividly in the construction of the Eiffel Tower, the symbol of a new age



František Kupka
Alphonse Mucha, 1898
Study for the Diploma of the
Czech Beseda in Paris, 1898
Pencil, ink, watercolour and crayon
on paper, 54 x 35 cm / 21¼ x 13¾ in.

Self-portrait in Mucha's studio in the
rue de la Grande Chaumière, Paris, 1892
Photograph from original glass-plate negative



Death of Frederick Barbarossa, 1898
Illustration for *Scènes et Épisodes de l'Histoire d'Allemagne* by Charles Seignobos
Published by Armand Colin et Cie, Paris

One of the 33 illustrations contributed by Mucha for this book, the picture shows the episode involving the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (1122–1190), who drowned in the Saleph River. Placing his naked lifeless body on the riverbank amidst the gnarled old trees, Mucha captured the uncanny silence of the scene. An oil study of this illustration was among the works exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1894.

and new technology. From the rooftop of his apartment, Mucha was able to see the rapidly growing height of this iron structure, which was to be completed for the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889. Consumer culture was thriving too. Le Bon Marché, the best-known department store in the city and which Émile Zola (1840–1902) had called "*Une cathédrale de commerce pour un peuple de client*", unveiled its new face in 1887, after refurbishment undertaken by Gustave Eiffel (1832–1923), the very same architect of the iron tower. The texture of Parisian society was also changing, with increasing numbers of immigrants arriving from the provinces as well as foreigners from France's overseas colonies and other parts of the world. The population of Paris grew from 1.9 million in 1872 to 2.4 million in 1891. Although the Czech population was small, with the focus of the Paris Beseda, a society founded in 1862 by an émigré group in the city to help new arrivals, the Czechs formed a close-knit community. As well as joining the Paris Beseda (see p. 15) Mucha set up the Lada club for young Slavic artists – not only Czechs but also Russians and Poles – whose numbers grew every month.

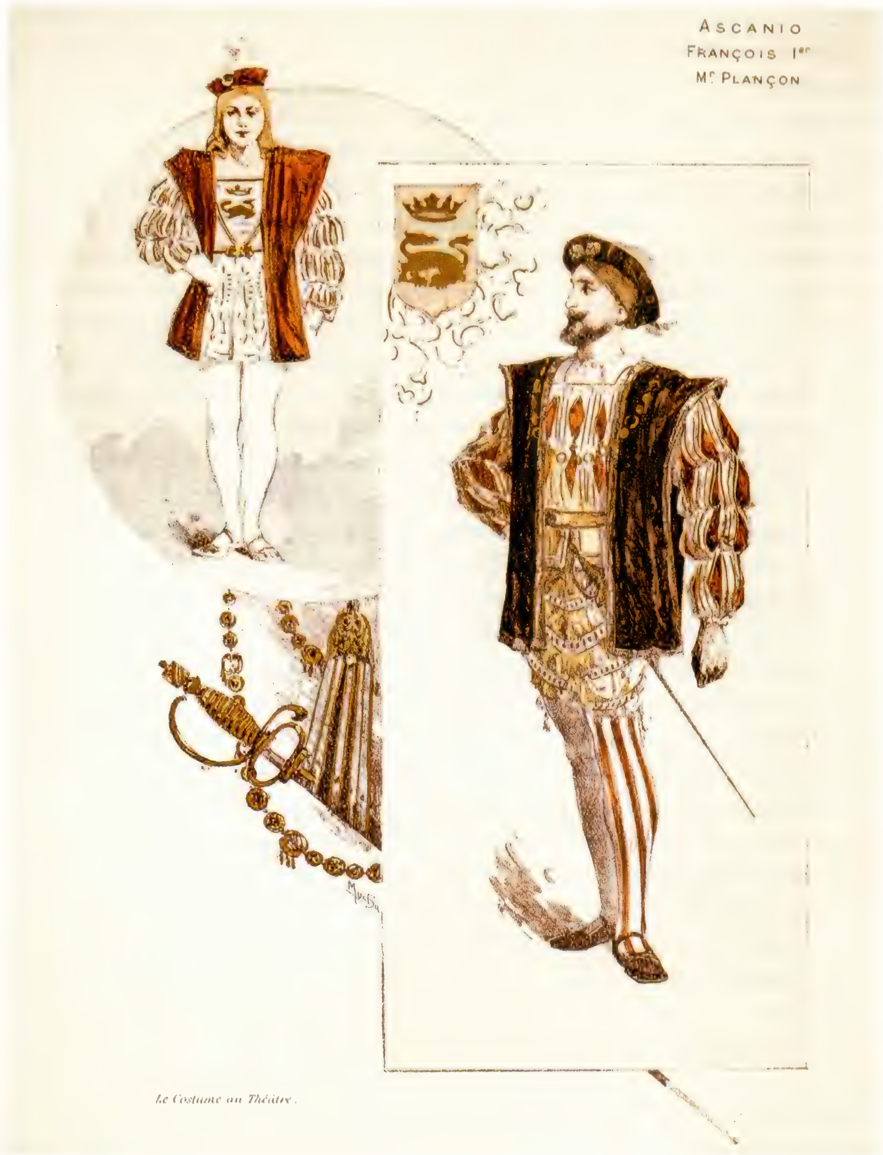
In the late autumn of 1888, Mucha moved to another private art school, the Académie Colarossi at 10, rue de la Grande Chaumière. Situated in the Latin Quarter, a famed students' district, the school was in close proximity to the Sorbonne and the École des Beaux-Arts, while inexpensive cafés and lodgings for the students as well as artists' studios were spreading to the school's neighbourhood. Like the Académie Julian, the school attracted foreign students as well as unconventional French students such as Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) in the mid-1870s, who aspired to switch his career from stock-broking to painting, as well as Camille Claudel (1864–1943) in the early 1880s, who pursued sculpture, still a rare field for a woman at the time. The tutors in Mucha's time included Raphaël Collin (1850–1916), who was known for a hybrid painting style combining academic subjects with the luminous effects of light and atmosphere '*en plein air*'. Collin was then forging a strong bond with Japan and his style was particularly influential on the Japanese artists studying in Paris, the future founders of a new genre of 'Yōga' (Western-style paintings) in Japan. While Collin's taste for Japanese arts was shared by many contemporary artists under the vogue of Japonisme, it is conceivable that it was these Franco-Japanese ties at the Académie Colarossi that contributed to Mucha's interest in Japanese art objects, which he began to collect along with other Oriental and exotic bric-a-brac during the early 1890s (see p. 14).

Unfortunately, however, Mucha's formal art training was abruptly terminated in early 1889. Count Eduard Khuen-Belasi, Mucha's sponsor for the past seven years, had decided to discontinue his financial support to his prodigy for unknown reasons. The news was a blow (although later the Count explained this move as a 'medicine' to help Mucha's artistic development). Now the 28-year-old Mucha had to endeavour to stand on his own feet to earn his living.

Initial financial hardship was eased by Mucha's natural drawing skills and his long-standing experience as an illustrator. While he continued to produce illustrations for Filip Kuber's magazines, Mucha also began to send his drawings to publishing houses in both Prague and Paris. Thanks to the flourishing publishing industry in both cities, opportunities for illustration jobs for young artists were becoming more plentiful. Mucha's works began to appear in popular art and literature magazines such as *Světozor* in Prague and *La Vie Populaire* in Paris. Many of his fellow illustrators were not interested in imparting individual artistic quality to their original drawings or paintings, which, in their view, would be

"I prefer to be someone who makes pictures for people, rather than who creates art for art's sake."

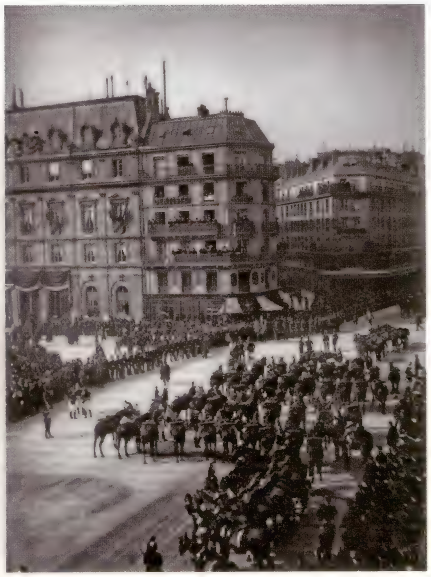
— ALPHONSE MUCHA

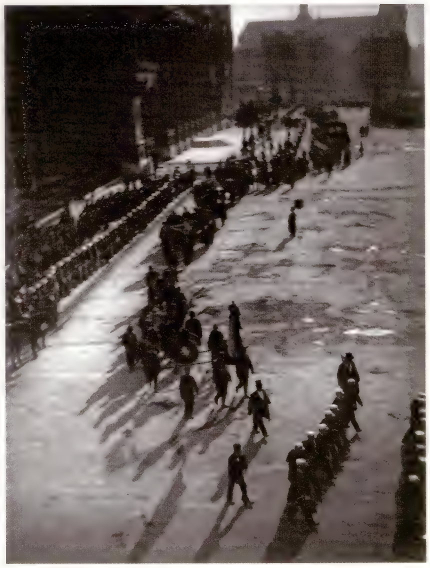


Costumes for the Opera *Ascanio*, 1890
Illustrations for *Le Costume au Théâtre*
Published by the Librairie Centrale des Beaux-Arts

'deformed' through the hands of engravers or lithographers for printing, but Mucha took his illustrations seriously. He approached his assignments in the same manner as for fine-art works by carrying out thorough research on the subjects and making numerous sketches from life as well as studies in varied media. Explaining the reason behind his method, he wrote: "[After leaving the Académie Colarossi] I found myself in the embarrassing predicament of someone with an incomplete education. I had to work in order to live and, at the same time, I had to continue my studies. I regarded every commission as a study from life."

Gradually Mucha acquired a reputation as a conscientious, reliable illustrator among Parisian editors and publishers. One of the first to spot his flair was Henri Bourrelier, the editor of *Le Petit Français Illustré* published by Armand Colin, a well-known educational publishing house. *Le Petit Français Illustré* was a new weekly youth magazine, featuring serialised illustrated stories, which needed fresh talent. Mucha became the magazine's regular illustrator, which led him to





Funeral procession of the French President, Marie François Sadi Carnot, Paris, July 1, 1894 (from a series of nine views)
Photographs from original glass-plate negatives

Documenting the funeral procession, Mucha used a succession of images to capture the movement of the crowd and the rows of soldiers and dignitaries, very similar to today's news-film footage. These photographs also demonstrate Mucha's interest in the abstract patterns made by the figures as seen from a high vantage point.

another commission from Armand Colin around 1891. This was a major project to illustrate a book by Charles Seignobos (1854–1942), *Scènes et Épisodes de l'Histoire d'Allemagne*, in collaboration with Georges Rochegrosse (1859–1938). Seignobos was then a rising Sorbonne scholar and Rochegrosse was one of the most popular Salon painters. For Mucha this meant the first professional acknowledgement of his art, which would now stand alongside the works of established artists such as Rochegrosse. As a patriotic Czech, however, Mucha was initially faced with a dilemma about gaining public recognition through a publication concerning the history of the German people and civilisation, which also encompassed conflicts with the Slavs and his own homeland. Despite this, and helped by Seignobos's clear and unbiased narrative, Mucha began to appreciate the contribution of German culture, which was worthy of respect, and he decided to illustrate key moments when the Czechs also played a significant role which impacted on the subsequent history of Europe as a whole. For this book (completed in 1897; published in 1898), Mucha eventually produced 33 illustrations (p. 16) whilst Rochegrosse contributed seven. This experience was to prove useful later when Mucha was conceptualising the *Slav Epic* project.

During this period, Mucha was also given helping hands from the Slav community. Władysław Ślewiński (1856–1918), a Polish painter and friend from the Académie Colarossi, introduced Mucha to Madame Charlotte Caron's (1849–1925) Crèmerie at 13, rue de la Grande Chaumière. This was a famous haunt for struggling artists, where the maternal Madame Charlotte served them nourishing meals for little money or often simply in exchange for artworks, as well as giving a sympathetic ear and advice. Ślewiński also found a little room for Mucha above the Crèmerie, and thus he became a member of this 'international bohemian society' formed largely of Slavs, Scandinavians and the French. Another artist called Kadár brought Mucha the illustration job for *Le Costume au Théâtre* (p. 17), which gave Mucha the opportunity to collaborate with Kadár as well as the Montmartre-based Swiss graphic artist Théophile Steinlen (1859–1923).

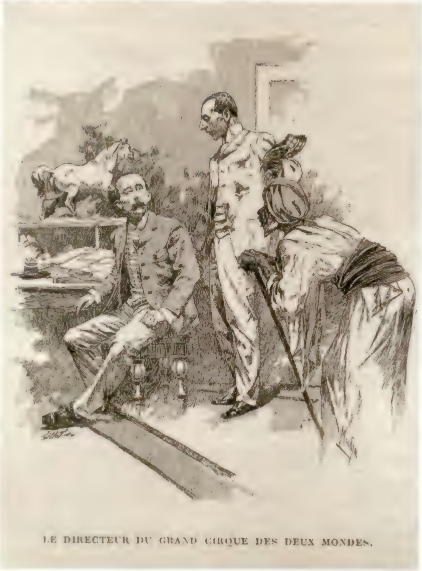
With his growing reputation as an illustrator, Mucha's financial circumstances were improving too. He happily spent his first payments from his publishers on a harmonium, which revived his musical activities in the community. By 1893, he had also purchased his first camera, a 4x5-inch format using glass-plate negatives, which he used to take photographs of himself as well as his friends striking theatrical poses for his illustrations. From this time onwards, self-portrait, often in the Russian shirt symbolising Slavic unity (p. 92), became one of the recurring themes in Mucha's works, especially photographs. Moreover, the use of photography for composing scenes (*mise-en-scène*) became Mucha's regular method for interpreting narratives and for developing the characters to be depicted in his work.

Among Mucha's friends photographed during this period was Gauguin, who had met Mucha in early 1891 at Madame Charlotte's before his first trip to Tahiti. In the summer of 1893, when Gauguin returned to Paris, he and Mucha renewed their friendship. Mucha was then living in a larger room with a studio across the road at No. 8 and he invited the penniless Gauguin to share his studio for a while. Several surviving photographs include an informal portrait of Gauguin seated at Mucha's harmonium, half-dressed (p. 93 left), as well as a *mise-en-scène* with Gauguin posing for Mucha's illustration for a scene in Judith Gautier's (1845–1917) novel, *Mémoires d'un Éléphant Blanc*, which was serialised in *Le Petit Français Illustré* between September 1893 and January 1894 (see p. 19).

In the summer of 1894, Mucha's endeavours paid off with unexpected artistic recognition. Four of his paintings, produced as studies for the illustrations for *Scènes et Épisodes de l'Histoire d'Allemagne* (p. 16), were exhibited at the Paris Salon which opened in May and he received an Honourable Mention. Mucha's modest success was celebrated by the whole community at Madame Charlotte's. The joyous occasion was, however, followed by the shocking news that shook the entire French nation: the assassination of Marie François Sadi Carnot (1837–1894), President of France, who was fatally stabbed by a 20-year-old Italian anarchist in Lyon on June 24. The incident had been preceded by a series of anarchist bombings in Paris over the previous few years, in protest against social injustices suffered by the underclass, thus revealing the other side of Belle Époque prosperity. Clearly affected by this violent event, Mucha documented Carnot's state funeral on July 1 in a series of photographs (p. 18), capturing from a high vantage point the movement of the funeral procession, "an unprecedented spectacle" according to a London newspaper.

In the late autumn of 1894, Mucha met August Strindberg (1849–1912), a friend of Gauguin's and a new arrival at Madame Charlotte's bohemian colony. He was living in a boarding house at No. 12, where he was to stay until February 1896. It was during this period that the Swedish writer was going through the 'Inferno Crisis' known from the title of his autobiographical novel, *Inferno* (1897). In his spiritual struggles, Strindberg was powerfully drawn to mysticism and occultism, the branches of Theosophy that pursued spiritual truth beneath the visible, material world. Promoted chiefly by Madame Blavatsky's (1831–1891) highly influential Theosophical Society, such spiritualist pursuits were spreading among European thinkers, paranormal scientists and artists during the late 19th century. Like his friends in Paris such as Gauguin, Sérusier and the Nabis, Mucha was also drawn to spiritualist thinking, and soon became Strindberg's regular companion for philosophical discussions. Through this friendship, Mucha was profoundly influenced by Strindberg's notion of the 'mysterious forces' that would guide a man's life. This was later to contribute to Mucha's own idea of 'unseen powers', which is manifested in his work as the recurring motif of a mysterious figure appearing behind the subject.

At the turn of the year 1894–95, while he was exploring the spiritual world with Strindberg, Mucha was also going through the greatest turning point in his life. It was then that Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923), the actress called 'the Divine', was to step into his life and become the catalyst for this change.


LE DIRECTEUR DU GRAND CIRQUE DES DEUX MONDES.

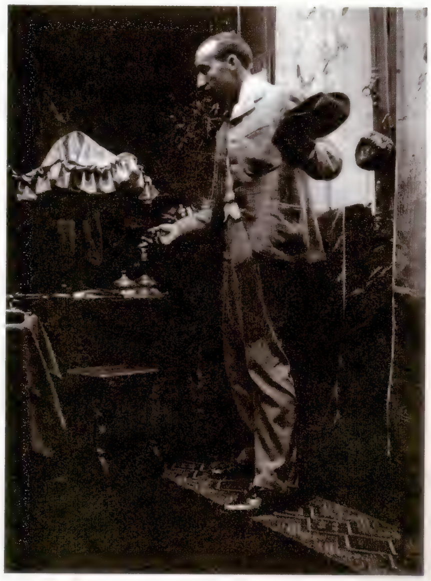
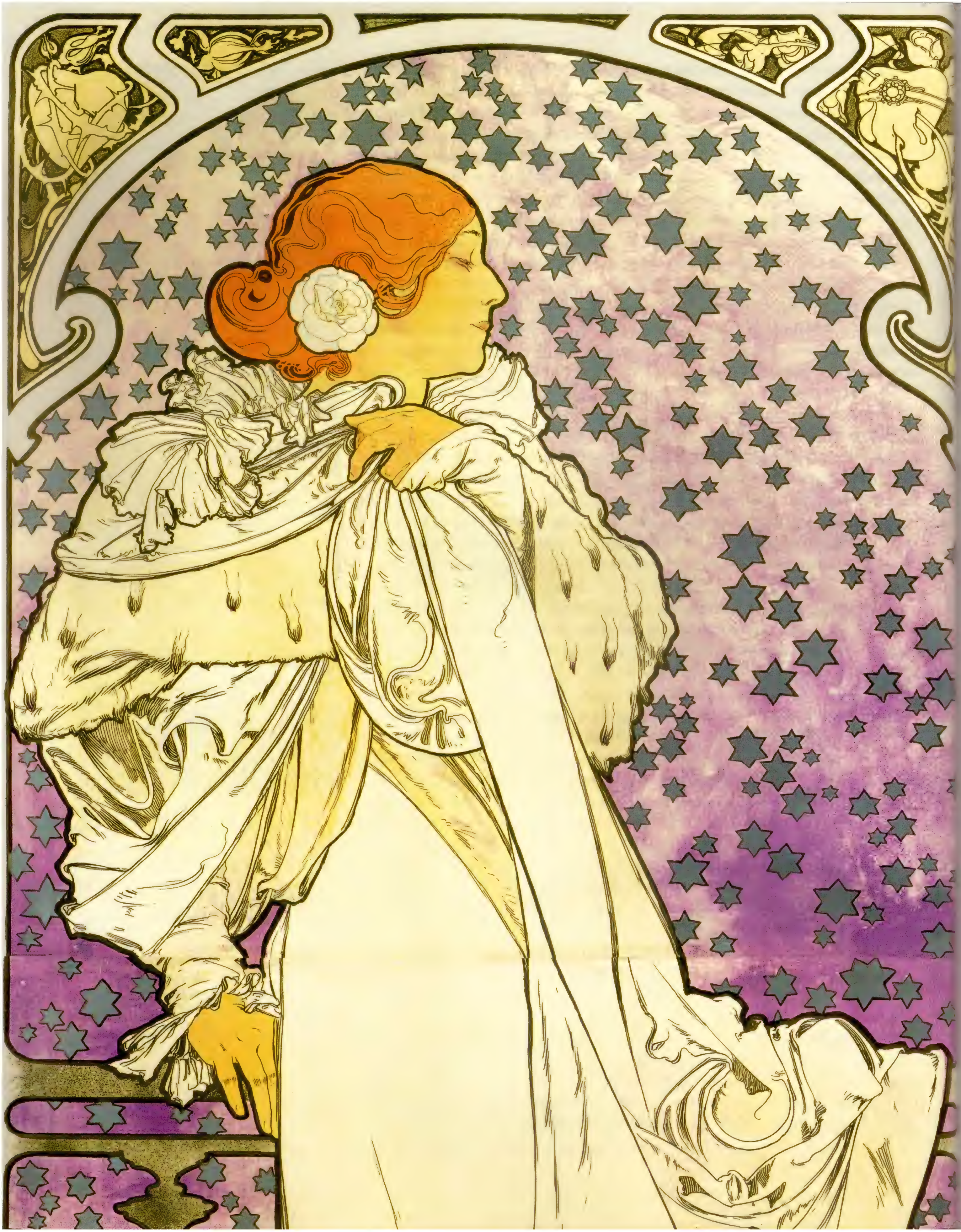


Illustration for *Mémoires d'un Éléphant Blanc*
by Judith Gautier, 1894
Published by Armand Colin & Cie, Paris

Paul Gauguin posing for Mucha's illustration
for *Mémoires d'un Éléphant Blanc*, 1893
Photograph from original glass-plate negative

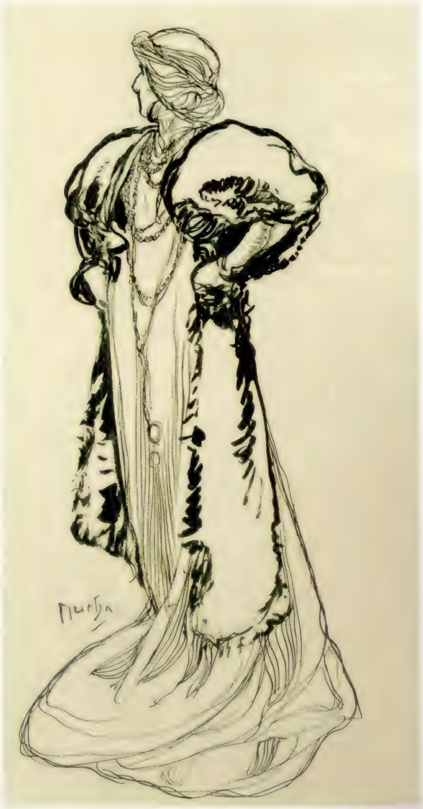


The Divine Sarah and Art Nouveau

Sarah Bernhardt was the first superstar long before the notion was created by Hollywood's star-making system. Not only was she a gifted performer on stage in the classic sense, but she also had the charisma to charm the masses. In the age of developing mass-media culture, she intuitively knew the most effective means for making her appeal known to the public. She was one of the earliest show-business personalities to exploit photography and modern printing technology in order to reach a wider audience. Moreover, she lent her name to commercial products, and created the famous myth of 'sleeping in her coffin' by provoking the public imagination with a photograph of her in this pose. Consequently, she attracted a level of public attention unprecedented for her time, making her probably the most visible actress in the world.

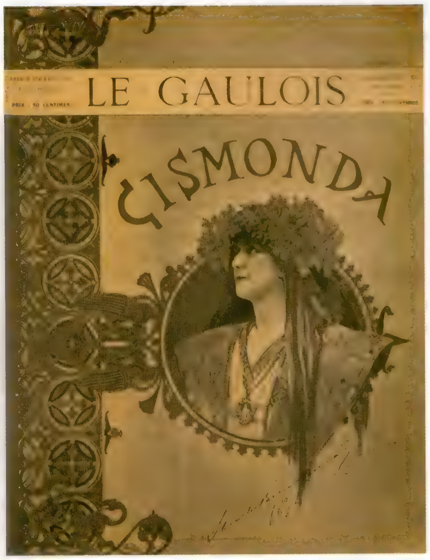
Mucha began to work for this superstar actress towards the end of 1894 with a poster advertising the new production of the play *Gismonda* to be staged from January 4, 1895, at the Théâtre de la Renaissance (pp. 23, 25). Bernhardt had bought this theatre herself in 1893, when she was the actor-director-producer there. The original production of the play was premièred on October 31, 1894, but it was then withdrawn before Christmas. Presumably, there was a poster made for the première but none has survived. What is certain is that the Divine Sarah was dissatisfied with the existing design, and the play was revived in the New Year with a new poster by Mucha.

According to Mucha's own account, the story began with a telephone call from Bernhardt to Maurice de Brunhoff (1861–1937), the manager of the printing firm of Lemercier, on St. Stephen's Day (December 26). Bernhardt requested a new poster for *Gismonda*, which she insisted would be ready for New Year's Day. Unfortunately, it was the middle of the holiday period; none of the regular artists at Lemercier were available except for Mucha, who happened to be there, correcting proofs on behalf of his friend Kadár. With little time and no choices, de Brunhoff turned to Mucha in desperation and it was thus that Mucha was offered the job despite his lack of experience in this field. However, this account seems to exaggerate the 'fate' factor, stemming from Mucha's mystic tendency. Considering Mucha's good reputation as a draughtsman at the time and his substantial familiarity with the subject, de Brunhoff's decision was perfectly reasonable. Indeed, in November of 1894, Mucha had been despatched by Lemercier to watch *Gismonda* in order to depict "the most noteworthy scenes" from the



Sarah Bernhardt: study of full-standing figure, c. 1896
Pen and ink on paper,
41.5 x 26 cm / 16⅜ x 10¼ in.

La Dame aux Camélias (detail), 1896
Colour lithograph,
207.3 x 76.2 cm / 81⅝ x 30 in.



Le Gaulois, 1894
Special Christmas supplement
dedicated to *Gismonda*
Illustrated magazine published in 1894
Lithograph, 35 x 27 cm / 13¾ x 10⅝ in.

play for the Special Christmas Supplement of the Parisian newspaper, *Le Gaulois* (left). For this assignment he produced numerous watercolours and drawings, which were praised by the newspaper for their "exquisite graphic beauty". With this experience, Mucha must have been the most knowledgeable artist about the play at Lemercier.

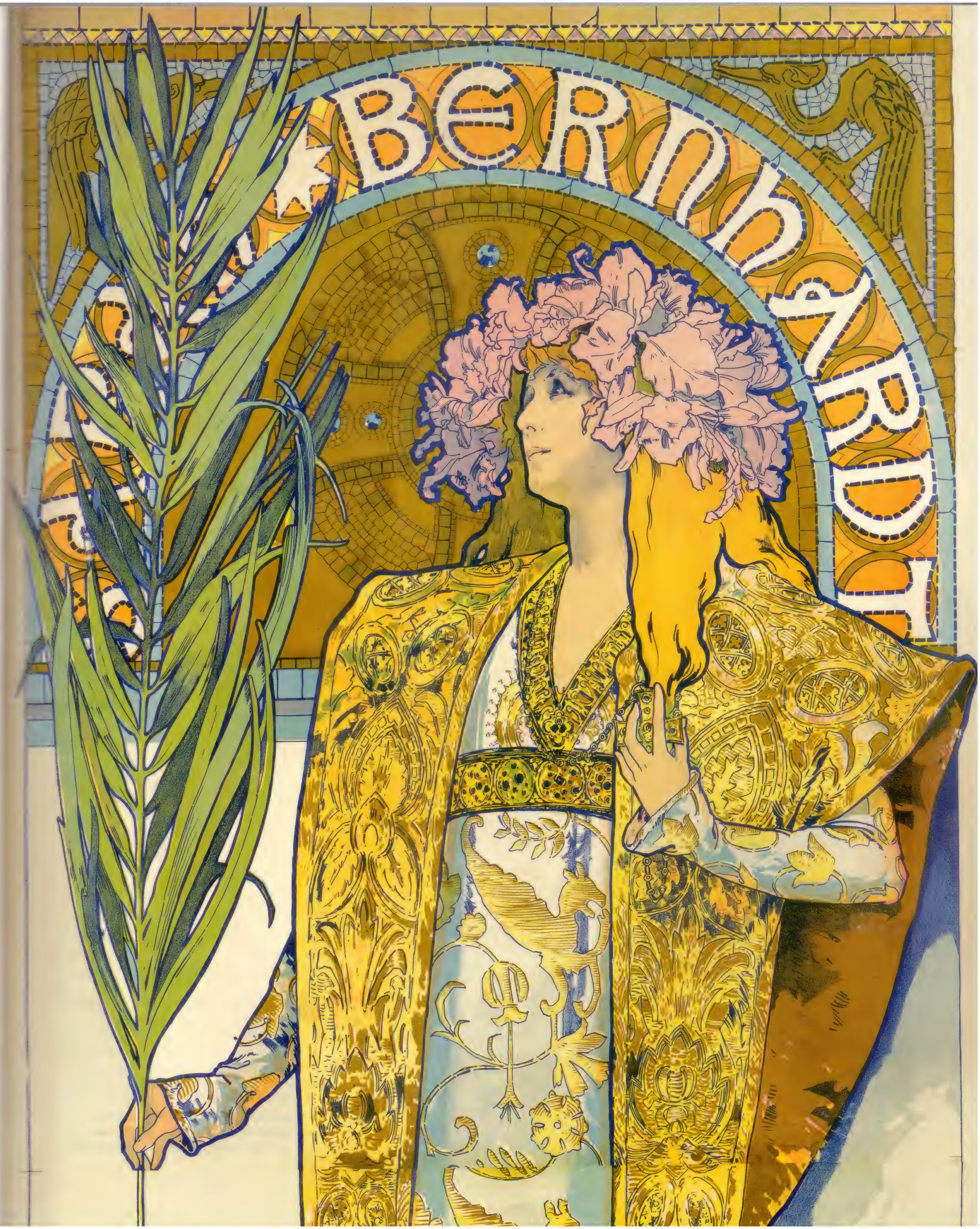
It is clear that Mucha benefited from his knowledge of the play when producing the poster, and in the limited time available the large stock of sketches and drawings for *Le Gaulois* proved indispensable. Mucha was able to select the most memorable scene – Gismonda's Palm Sunday procession – as the basis for his characterisation of Sarah Bernhardt in the role. Technical factors influenced the design too since Mucha's preferred choice of a vertical format to show the actress's full standing figure did not fit the proportions of the standard lithographic stone. As an economical solution, the image was printed in two parts on a single stone, with top and bottom side by side; the printed sheet was cut into two sections, which were then joined together, resulting in the unusually long format. Furthermore, and probably because of the limited time, Mucha had to simplify the background, leaving it blank except for the Byzantine mosaic tiles behind Gismonda's head, rather than filling in the entire area with ornamental details, as was the case in his preliminary sketch. As a result, however, Mucha's image became closer to Bernhardt's own aesthetics: "The most important factors on stage are us, the actors. This sort of junk [excessive stage props] is a distraction to the audience's attention."

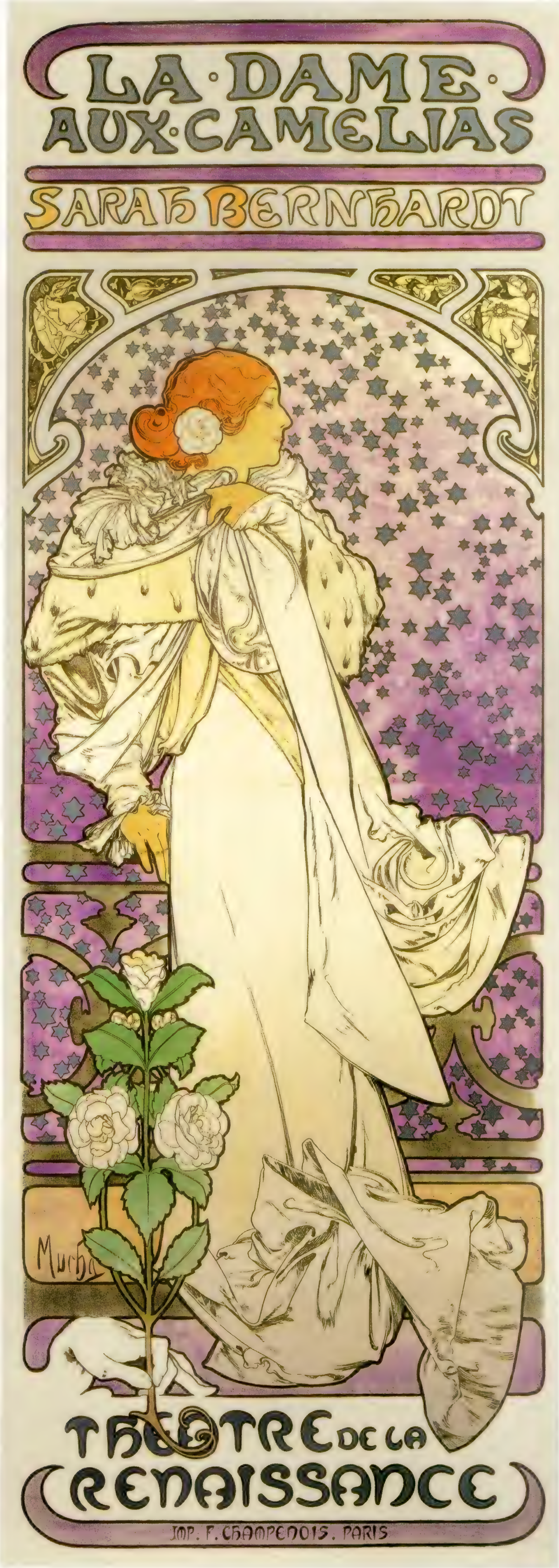
Yet Mucha's endeavour paid off. Bernhardt was thoroughly satisfied with his design and the finished poster for *Gismonda* appeared on the hoardings of Paris on January 1, 1895, causing a great sensation. Mucha was at the time primarily known as a book illustrator but he soon became the most talked-about poster artist in the French capital.

Paris was also then entering a golden age of posters. Thanks to the advancement of colour lithography and increasing demands for advertising in Belle Époque consumerism, the artistic quality of posters saw considerable improvements. With such recent examples as those by Jules Chéret (1836–1932), Eugène Grasset (1845–1917) and Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901), posters were now becoming a new form of visual art beyond their primary function as tools for advertising; they were thus also worthy of critical attention and were becoming collectible objects. Mucha wrote later about the poster culture in *fin-de-siècle* Paris that "posters were a good way of enlightening the wider public. They would stop and see the posters on their way to work, deriving spiritual pleasure from them. The streets became open-air art exhibitions."

Mucha's *Gismonda* sent a breath of fresh air through these "open-air art exhibitions" owing to its striking design, which featured the following: the impressive life-size figure of the Divine Sarah presented in a distinctive format; the mystical and exotic effects created by the Byzantine mosaic motifs as well as her orchid headdress and a palm branch; and flowing outlines rendered by exquisite draughtsmanship and the tastefully restrained colours in contrast to the much brighter hues common in contemporary Parisian posters. Altogether, these elements gave a measure of dignity – a quality not usually expected from posters – to Mucha's work. According to the Czech painter Ludvík Kuba (1863–1956), who was then amongst the crowd admiring Mucha's poster, its delicate pastel colours and the decorative effect of the Byzantine motifs were so powerful that the impact was a "revelation". Delighted by her 'discovery' of a new talent, Bernhardt offered Mucha a contract to produce more work for her and her theatre, design-

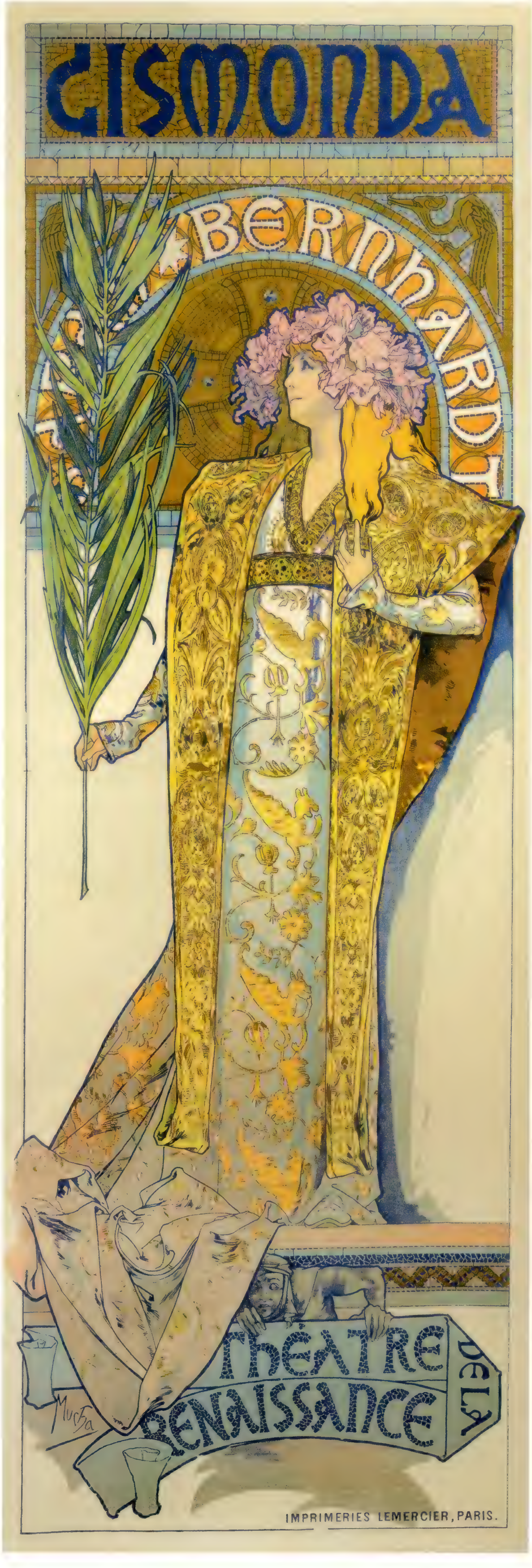
Gismonda (detail), 1894
Colour lithograph,
216 x 74.2 cm / 85 x 29¼ in.


BERNHARDT


LA·DAME·
AUX·CAMELIAS
SARAH BERNHARDT
Mucha
THEATRE DE LA
RENAISSANCE
IMP. F. CHAMPENOIS. PARIS

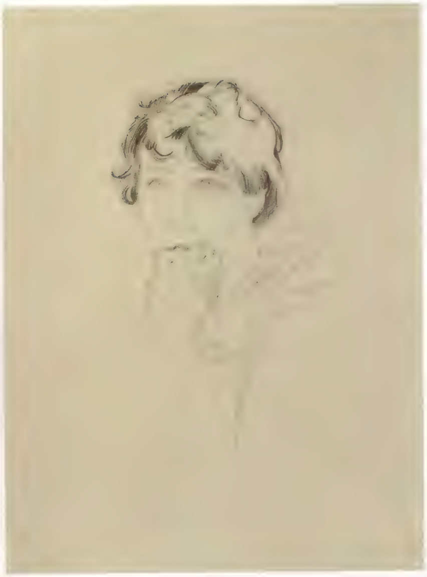
La Dame aux Camélias, 1896
Colour lithograph,
207.3 x 76.2 cm / 81⅝ x 30 in.

La Dame aux Camélias was originally written as a novel by Alexandre Dumas, fils (1824–1895), and subsequently adapted for the stage in 1852. This poster was prepared for Bernhardt's new production of the play, which was premièred on September 30, 1896. Presenting the tragic heroine Camille as a modern Parisian woman in a chic dress designed by Mucha, the poster not only renewed the old-fashioned image of the play but also influenced contemporary fashion.


GISMONDA
BERNHARDT
THÉATRE DE LA RENAISSANCE
Mucha
IMPRIMERIES LEMERCIER, PARIS.

Gismonda, 1894
Colour lithograph,
216 x 74.2 cm / 85 x 29¼ in.

Mucha portrayed Bernhardt as an exotic Byzantine noblewoman wearing a splendid gown and an orchid headdress with a palm branch in her hand. This costume was worn in the last act, the climax of the play, when she joined the Palm Sunday procession. Placing her life-size figure on an arched platform, Mucha rendered the beauty and dignity of her personality on stage rather than representing her realistic features or the story.



***Head of Sarah Bernhardt*, 1896**
Study for *Lorenzaccio*
Pencil on paper, 25 x 21.5 cm / 9⅞ x 8½ in.

ing posters, stage sets, costumes and jewellery, as well as serving as general artistic advisor. Under this contract, which ran from 1895 until 1900, Mucha designed six further posters for Bernhardt productions: *La Dame aux Camélias* (pp. 20, 24), *Lorenzaccio* (p. 27), *La Samaritaine* (p. 29), *Médée* (p. 31), *La Tosca* (1899) and *Hamlet* (p. 30). In designing these posters Mucha applied the same stylistic formula developed from *Gismonda*: the tall narrow format (the ratio of height to width being approximately 3:1) featuring the single figure of the actress standing and posing in the costume most appropriately representing the character in each play, which is placed on a platform, domed or with a halo, just like the devotional images familiar to Mucha from his childhood.

The collaboration between Bernhardt and Mucha proved to be mutually beneficial. With his consistent design principle and the repeated representation of Bernhardt as an idol, Mucha's posters created an enduring iconic image (see p. 28) which enhanced her status as an international superstar. From 1896 onwards, Bernhardt used Mucha's poster designs to publicise all her American tours. As for Mucha, the association with Bernhardt affected every aspect of his life from finance and social contacts to exposure to the public eye and media attention. Furthermore, Bernhardt became his muse, mentor and lifelong friend, and through this friendship Mucha grew as an artist. By closely observing every movement of this world-class actress both on stage and during rehearsals, he was able to gain deeper insights into theatrical expressions. He later wrote on his impressions of the actress: "Every feature of her face, every movement of her clothing, was profoundly conditioned by her spiritual need." He also noted "the particular magic of her movements", described as "a spiral principle" by the contemporary composer Reynaldo Hahn (1874–1947), as the flowing movement of her standing, turning or sitting made the train of her dress curl around her. Over the next few years, such details began to manifest themselves in his posters of the graceful female figure, often combined with a swirling tail of cloth or tendrils surrounding her body.

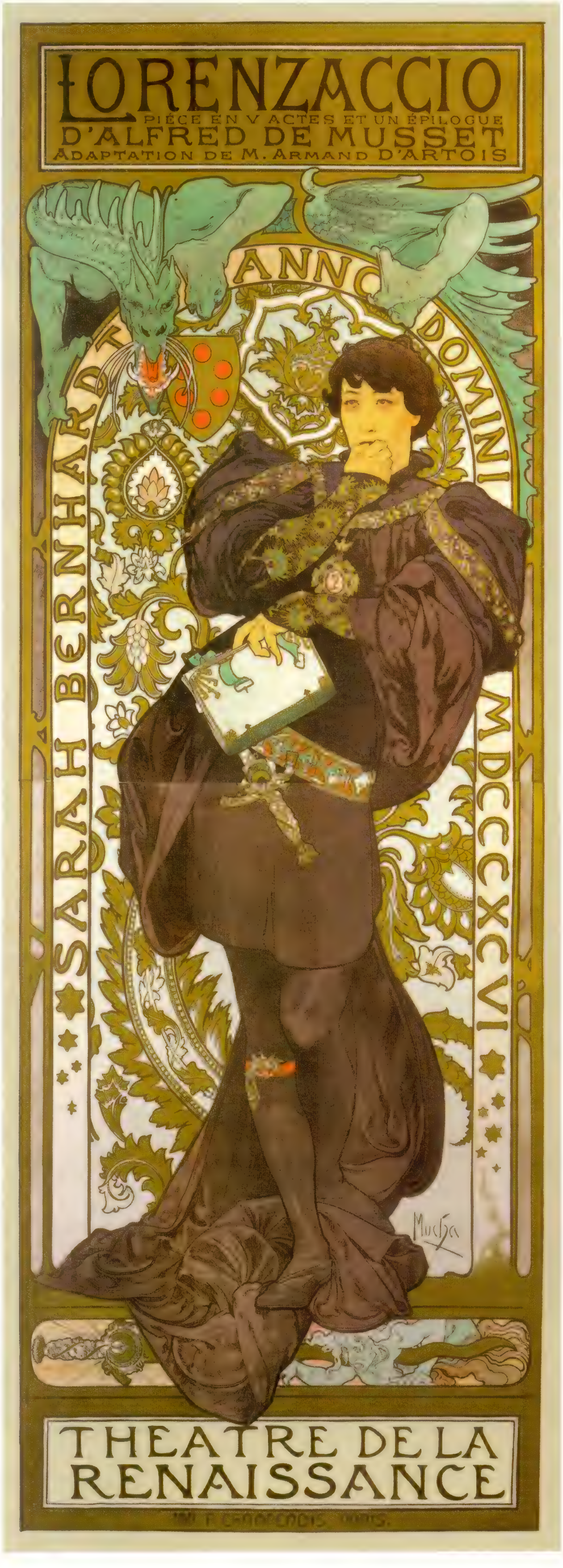
"She [Sarah Bernhardt] had expressiveness and classical nobility … and then there was the particular magic of her movements … Every feature of her face, every movement of her clothing, was profoundly conditioned by her spiritual need."

— ALPHONSE MUCHA

The success of *Gismonda* and his new status as Bernhardt's prodigy brought Mucha a flood of commissions from a variety of publishers and printers. Among them, the Parisian printer F. Champenois was the quickest to make a move, realising the great commercial possibilities in Mucha's work. Mucha was offered a generous monthly salary, in return for giving Champenois the right to reproduce all his designs. In 1896, Mucha signed an exclusive contract with the printer, and, thanks to his improved financial position, he was able to move to a beautiful house at 6, rue du Val-de-Grâce, originally built by the famous Baroque architect François Mansart (1598–1666), where he rented a three-bedroom apartment and a studio with large windows.

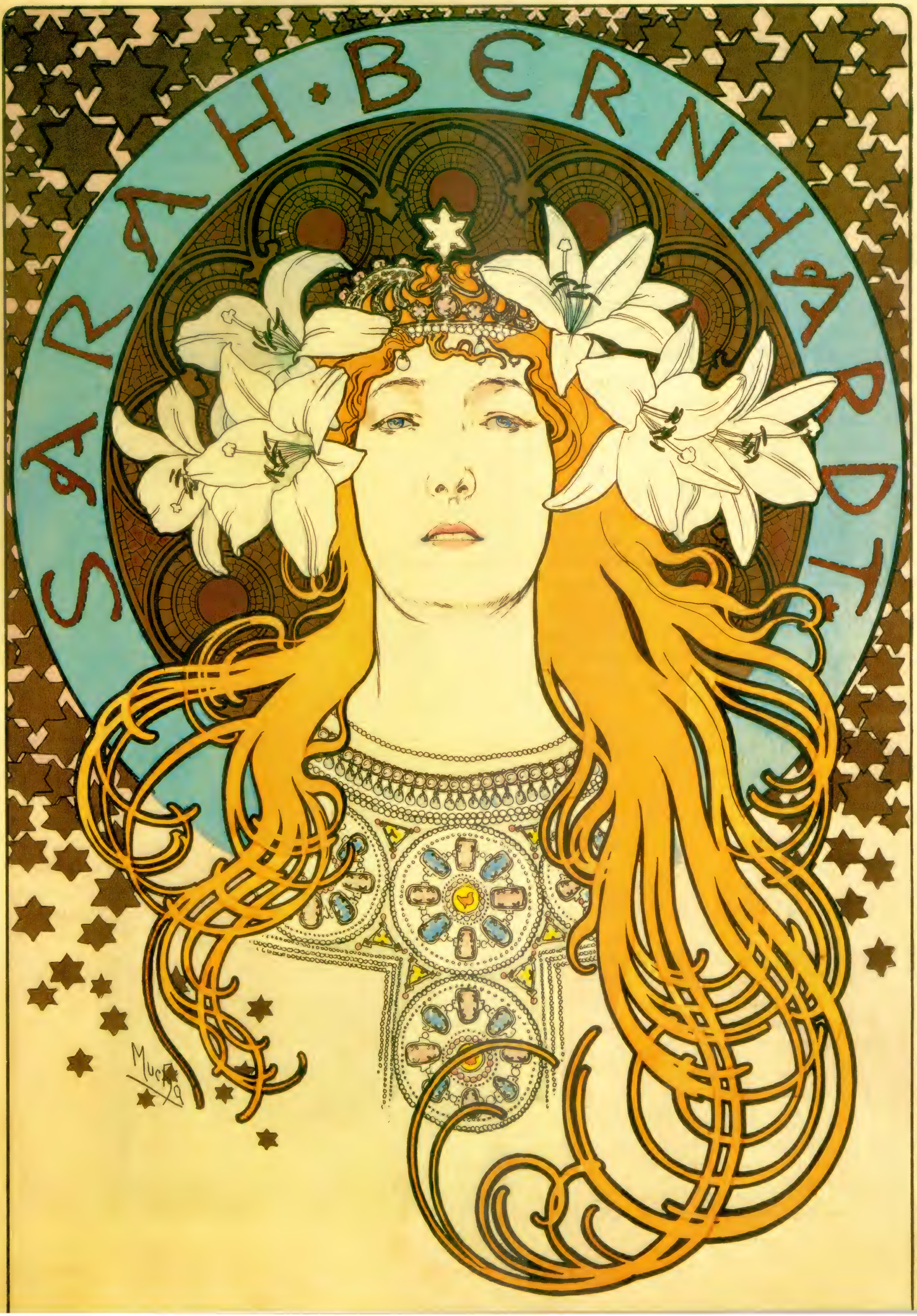
Champenois made Mucha busy with commissions for advertising posters, including ones for famous brands such as JOB (cigarette papers; p. 6), Ruinart (champagne), Lefèvre-Utile (biscuits; p. 46), Nestlé (baby food), Moët & Chandon (champagne; p. 43), Waverley (American bicycles) and Perfecta (English bicycles; p. 47). In addition, Mucha and Champenois embarked upon a new enterprise altogether – decorative panels (*panneaux décoratifs*). These were posters primarily without text, designed purely for decorative purposes. Produced in large quantities, these panels were also available to the wider public, becoming an alternative form of art, which could be displayed in ordinary households.

The first of Mucha's decorative panels was *The Seasons*, published in 1896 as a set of four posters featuring single figures of women personifying the four


LORENZACCIO
PIÈCE EN V ACTES ET UN ÉPILOGUE
D'ALFRED DE MUSSET
ADAPTATION DE M. ARMAND D'ARTOIS
SARAH BERNHARDT
ANNO DOMINI MDCCCXCVI
Mucha
THEATRE DE LA RENAISSANCE
IMP. F. CHAMPENOIS. PARIS.

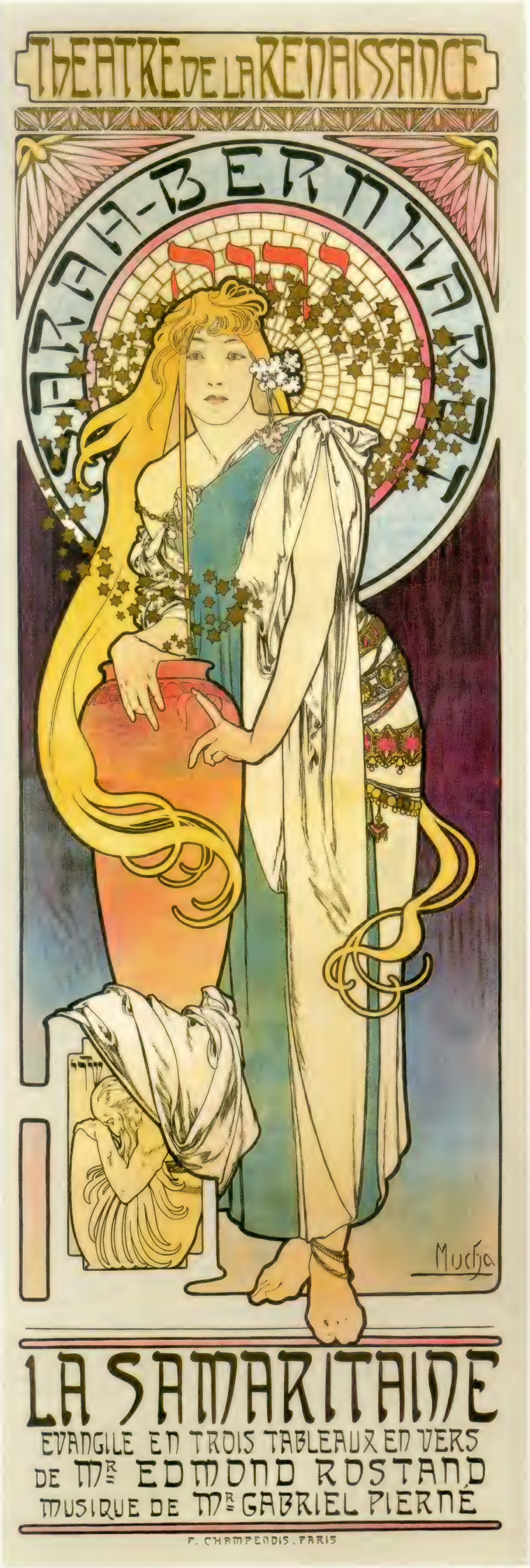
Lorenzaccio, 1896
Colour lithograph,
203.7 x 76 cm / 80¼ x 30 in.

Premièred on December 3, 1896, *Lorenzaccio* was a revival of the play written by Alfred de Musset (1810–1857) in 1834, set in 16th-century Florence. Bernhardt played the male role, Lorenzaccio (or Lorenzo) de' Medici, who assassinates Alessandro de' Medici, the tyrant duke of Florence and his cousin. While presenting Lorenzaccio as a dashing young man, whose elegantly S-curved figure is silhouetted against the arched window, Mucha focused at the same time on Bernhardt's facial expression to portray the hero's contemplation of murder.


SARAH·BERNHARDT
Mucha

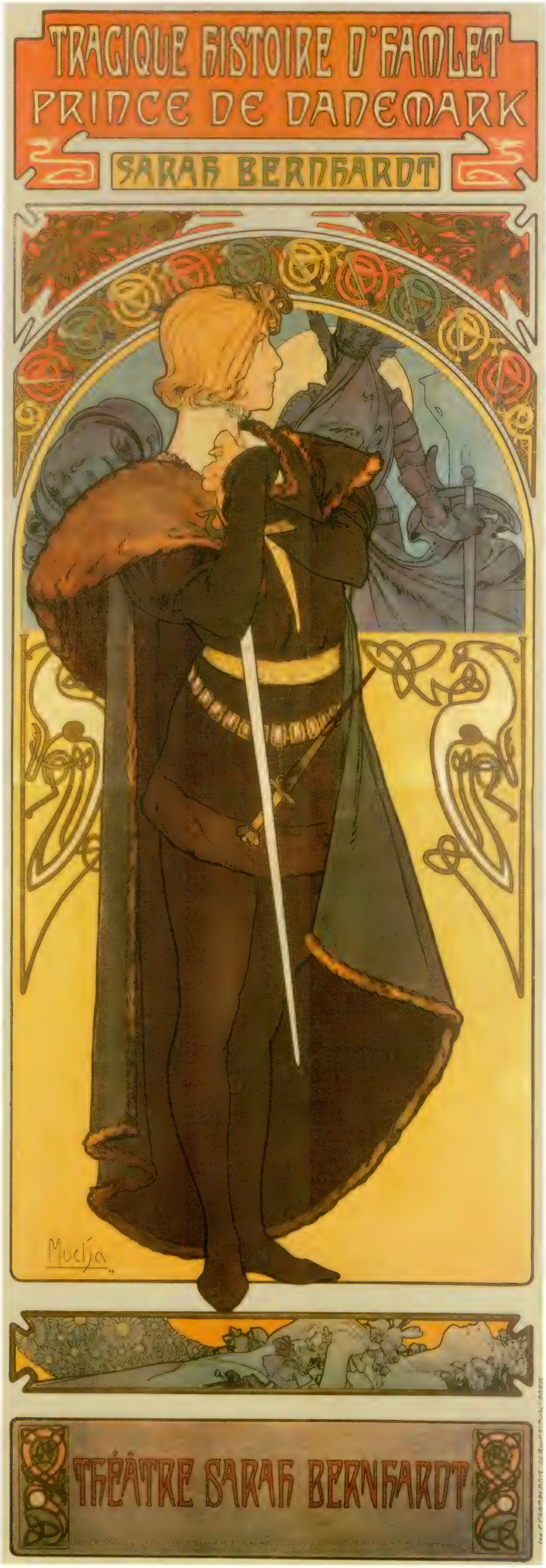
Sarah Bernhardt as Mélissinde, 1897
Art edition of poster for *La Plume* magazine
Colour lithograph, 69 x 51 cm / 27⅛ x 20⅛ in.

In portraying Bernhardt as Mélissinde in the play *La Princesse lointaine* by Edmond Rostand (1868–1918), Mucha's design was originally produced for the poster for the banquet held on December 9, 1896, in honour of the leading lady, as well as to announce the forthcoming article about her in *La Plume*. Its success prompted Champenois to recycle the design for a collectors' edition poster without the text, as seen here, and for a postcard.


THEATRE DE LA RENAISSANCE
SARAH-BERNHARDT
יהוה
Mucha
LA SAMARITAINE
EVANGILE EN TROIS TABLEAUX EN VERS
DE Mr EDMOND ROSTAND
MUSIQUE DE Mr GABRIEL PIERNÉ
F. CHAMPENOIS. PARIS

La Samaritaine, 1897
Colour lithograph, 173 x 58.3 cm / 68⅛ x 23 in.

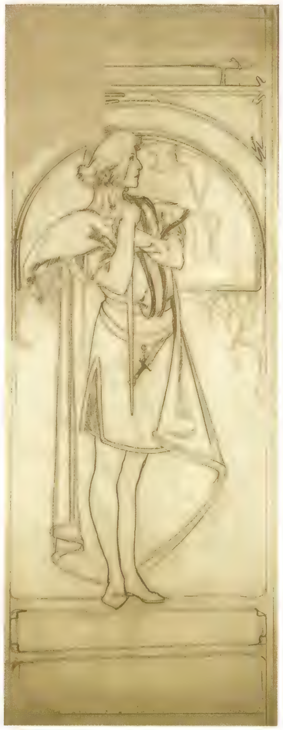
Premièred on April 14, 1897, the play drew on a theme from a Biblical episode about Photina, the Samaritan woman (John 4:1–30). The poster shows Bernhardt as Photina with a large water jar, which alludes to her encounter with Jesus at the well and her conversion to become one of his followers. Behind her head is a halo decorated with Hebrew letters (reading 'Jehovah') and the words 'Sarah Bernhardt' in the style of Hebrew script, which heightens the atmosphere of the play.

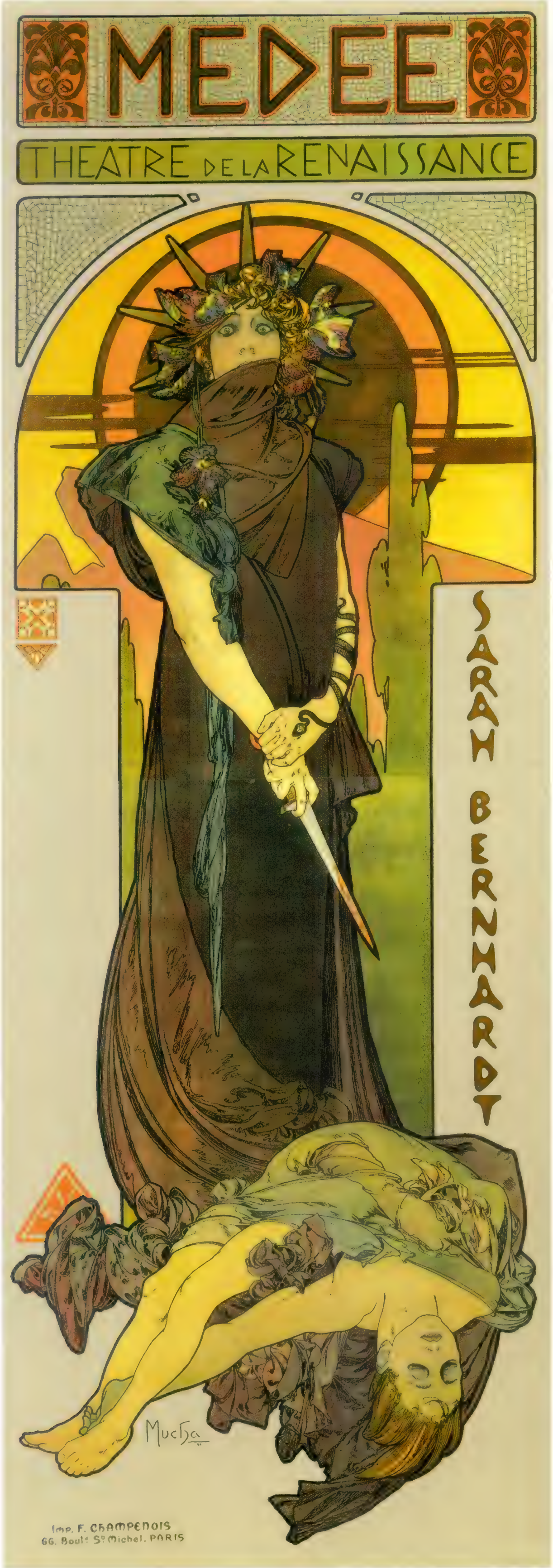

TRAGIQUE HISTOIRE D'HAMLET
PRINCE DE DANEMARK
SARAH BERNHARDT
Mucha
THÉÂTRE SARAH BERNHARDT

Hamlet, 1899
Colour lithograph,
207.5 x 76.5 cm / 81¾ x 30⅛ in.

This French adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was premièred in May 1899, starring Sarah Bernhardt in the title role. Mucha's poster presents the solitary figure of Hamlet against an arched background richly decorated with Celtic motifs. As exemplified in the cartoon, Mucha prepared many of his designs with well-defined outlines and at a scale of 1:1 in relation to the ultimate sizes of the posters, which enabled the draughtsmen and lithographers to reproduce the designs faithfully during production.

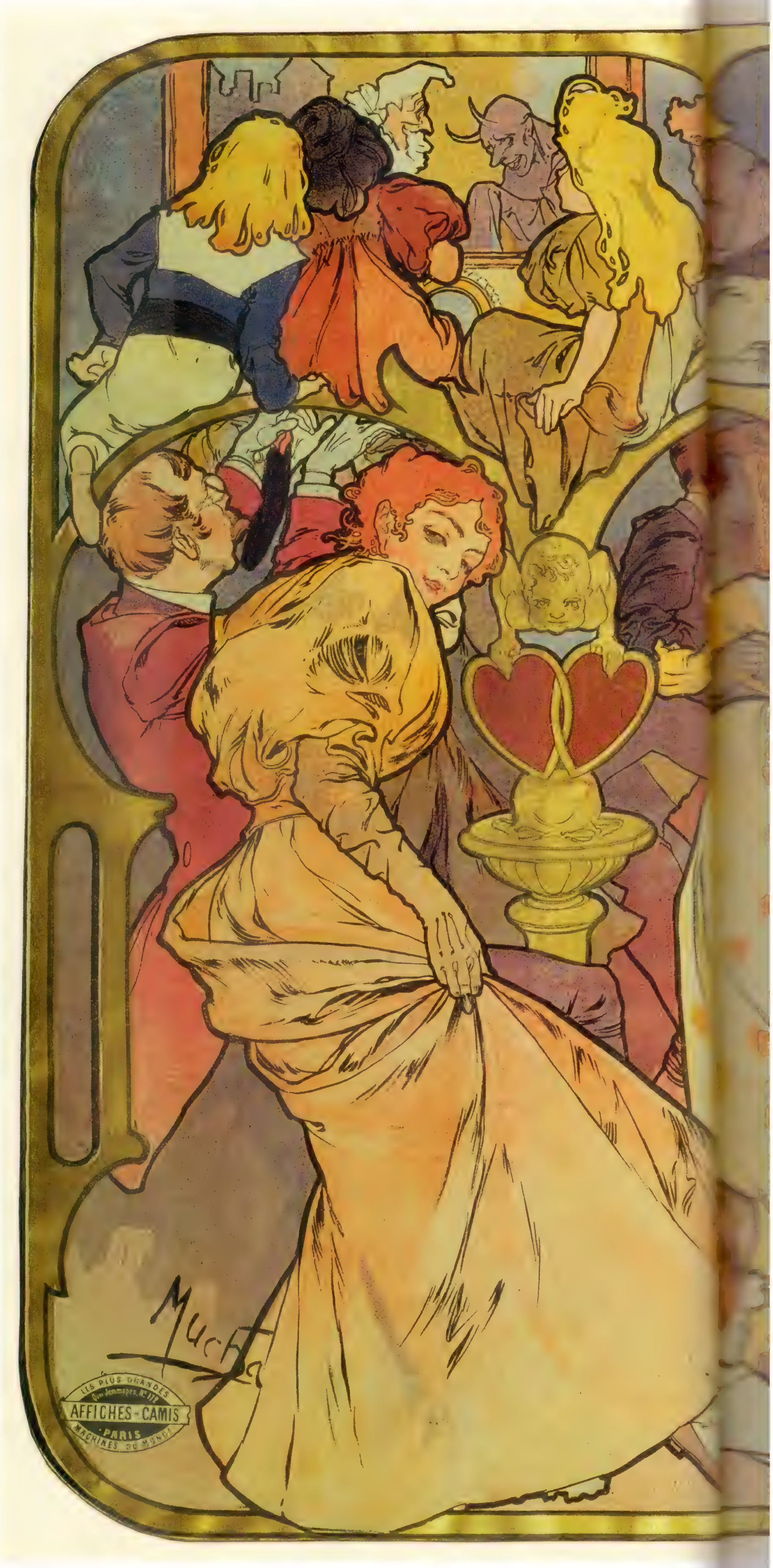
Cartoon for the poster of *Hamlet*, 1899
Charcoal on tracing paper,
201 x 77.2 cm / 79⅛ x 30⅜ in.




MEDEE
THEATRE DE LA RENAISSANCE
SARAH BERNHARDT
Mucha
Imp. F. CHAMPENOIS
66. Boul^d S^t Michel. PARIS

Médée, 1898
Colour lithograph, 206 x 76 cm / 81⅛ x 30 in.

Based on the Greek classic by Euripides (*c.* 480–406 BC), this adaptation of the play by Catulle Mendès (1841–1909) was written in 1898 especially for Sarah Bernhardt to portray the tragic heroine, who killed her two children by her husband Jason after he had betrayed and left them. The production was premièred on October 28, 1898. Mucha's poster captured the essence of the tragedy in the frozen figure of Médée, staring out and stiffly holding the bloodstained dagger in an extreme state of shock.

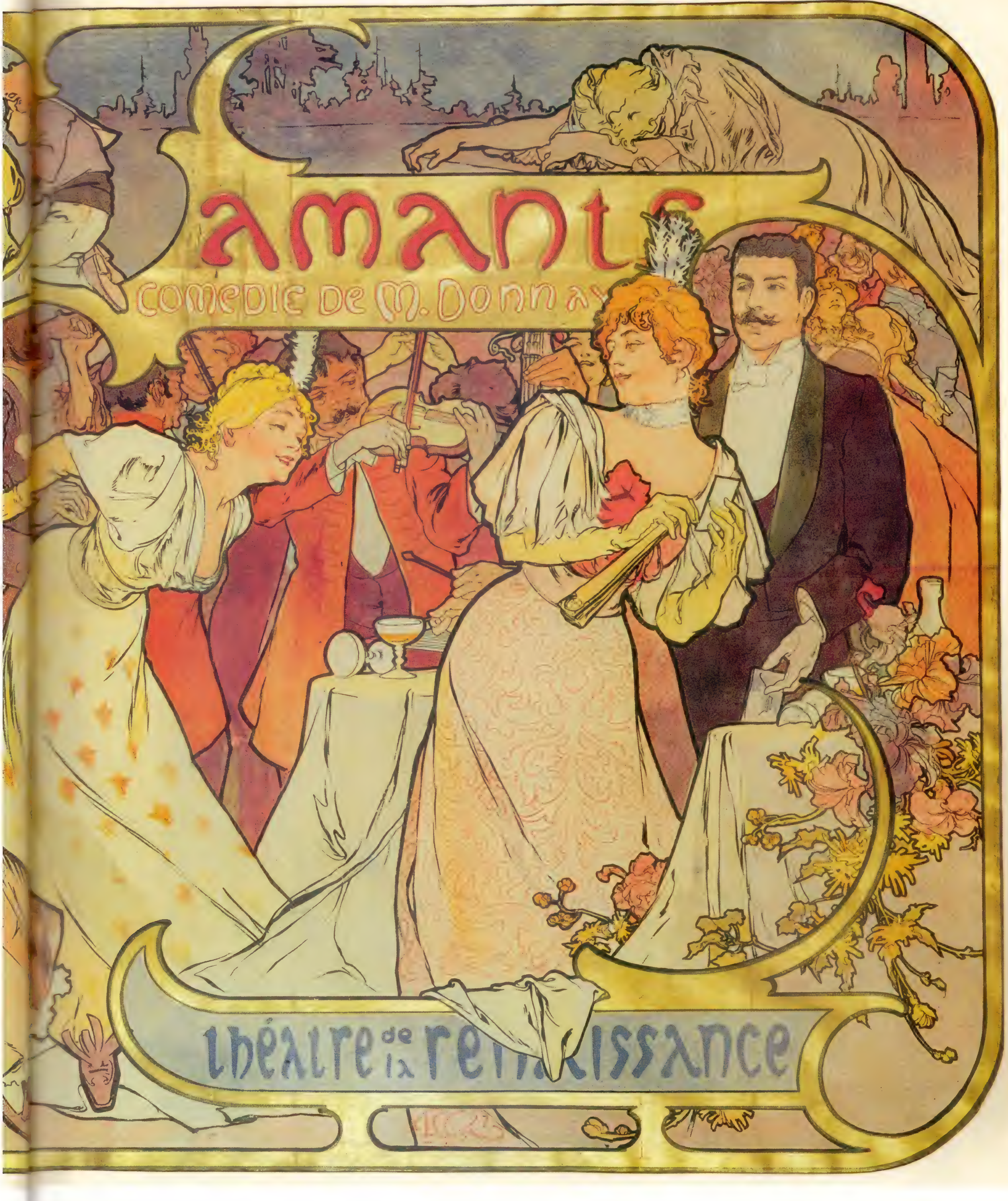


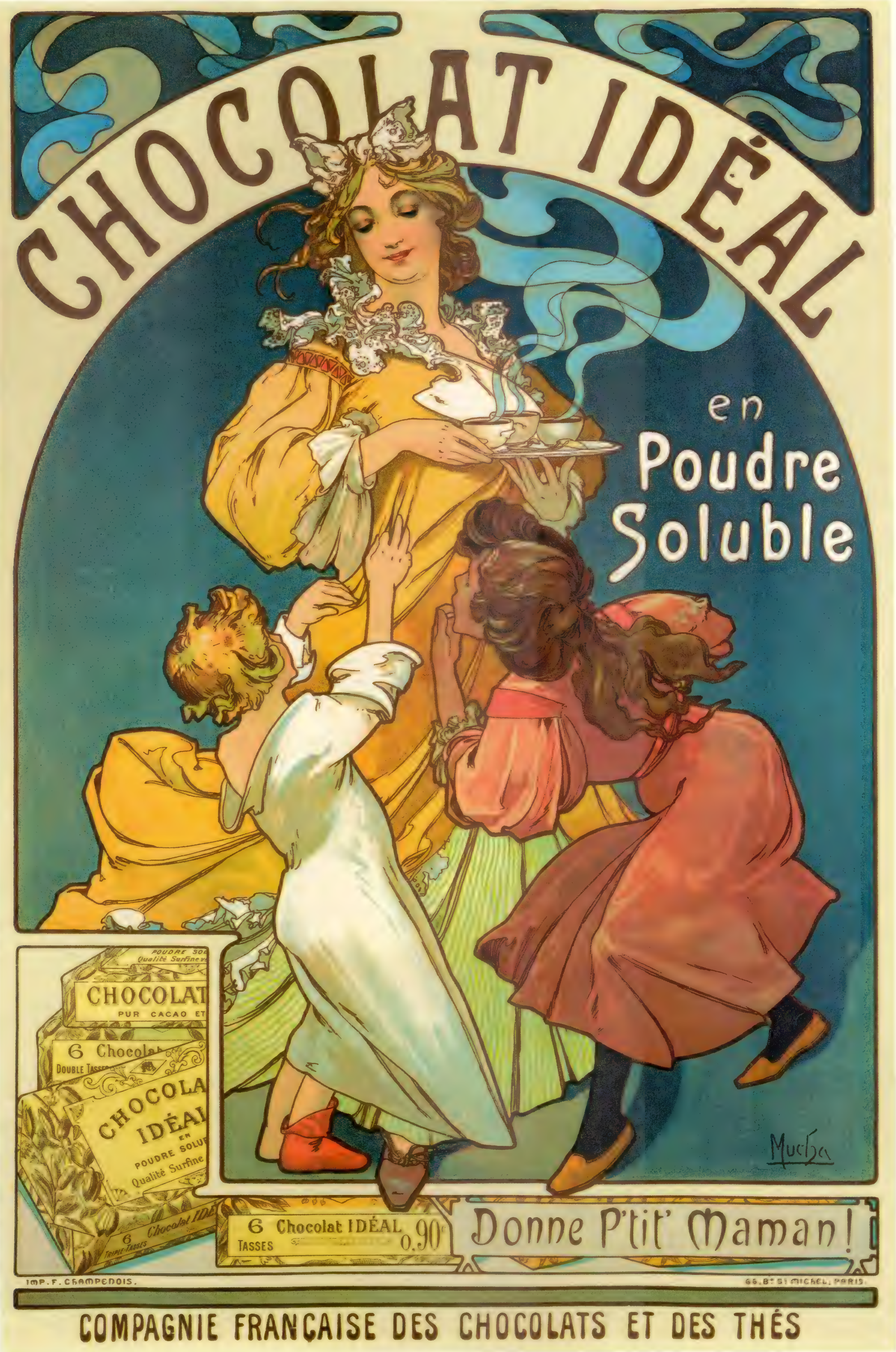
Amants, 1895
Colour lithograph,
106.5 x 137 cm / 42 x 54 in.

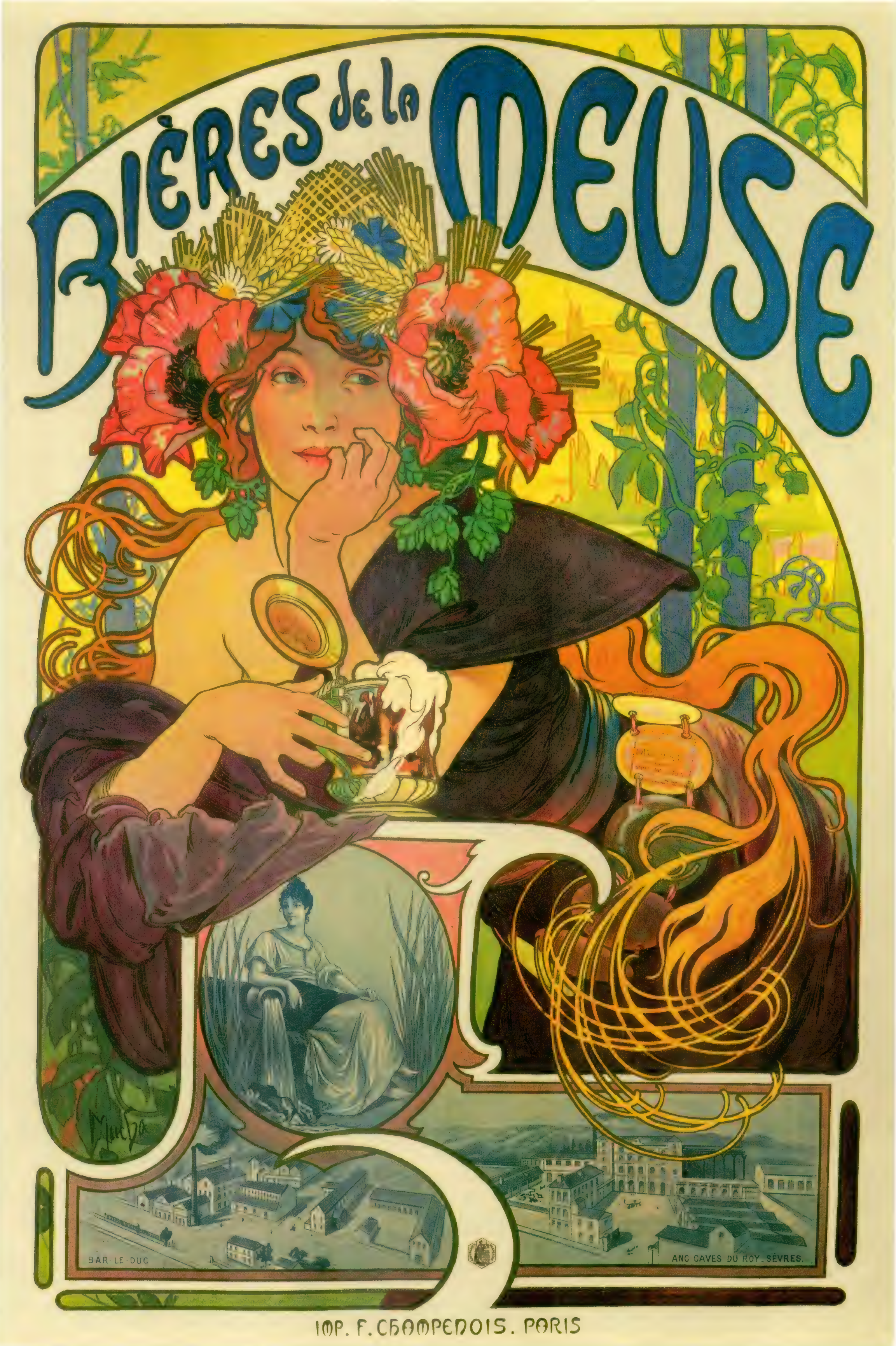
Mucha's first theatrical poster after signing the contract with Sarah Bernhardt was for a comedy by Maurice Donnay, premièred on November 5, 1895, but without Bernhardt herself. Unlike Mucha's designs for the great actress, this wide-format poster is packed with numerous figures. The composition is divided into three scenes: a Punch and Judy show in the top left, a tragedy in the top right and a party scene dominating the lower part, where three figures of fashionable women offer a harmonious rhythm to the overall composition.

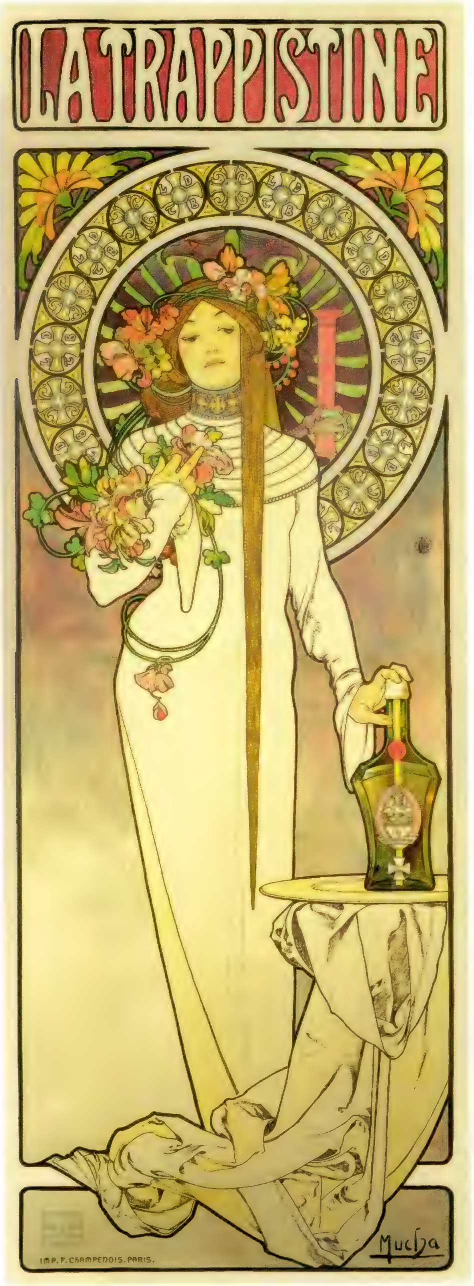
PAGE 34
Chocolat Idéal, 1897
Colour lithograph,
117 x 78 cm / 46 x 30¾ in.

PAGE 35
Bières de la Meuse, 1897
Colour lithograph,
154.5 x 104.5 cm / 60⅞ x 41⅛ in.


amants
COMEDIE DE M. DONN
théâtre de la renaissance


CHOCOLAT IDÉAL
en Poudre Soluble
POUDRE SOL
Qualité Surfine
CHOCOLAT
PUR CACAO ET
6 Chocolat
DOUBLE TASSES
CHOCOLAT IDÉAL EN POUDRE SOLU Qualité Surfine
6 TRIPLE TASSES Chocolat IDÉ
6 Chocolat IDÉAL TASSES 0.90
Mucha
Donne P'tit' Maman!
IMP. F. CHAMPENOIS.
66, Bd St MICHEL, PARIS.
COMPAGNIE FRANÇAISE DES CHOCOLATS ET DES THÉS


BIÈRES de la MEUSE
Mucha
BAR LE DUC
ANC CAVES DU ROY. SÈVRES.
IMP. F. CHAMPENOIS. PARIS



La Trappistine, 1897
Colour lithograph, 206 x 77 cm / 81⅛ x 30¼ in.

PAGES 38–39
The Seasons, 1896
Colour lithograph, 54 x 103 cm /
21¼ x 40½ in.

Here depicting a popular and classic theme, Mucha personified the seasons as nymph-like women in a series of four panels. Each one captures the mood of the season – innocent Spring, sultry Summer, fruitful Autumn and frosty Winter – against a corresponding seasonal landscape; as a whole together they represent the harmonious cycle of nature. The great success of this series led to many variants, including this design incorporating all four panels into a single ornamental frame.

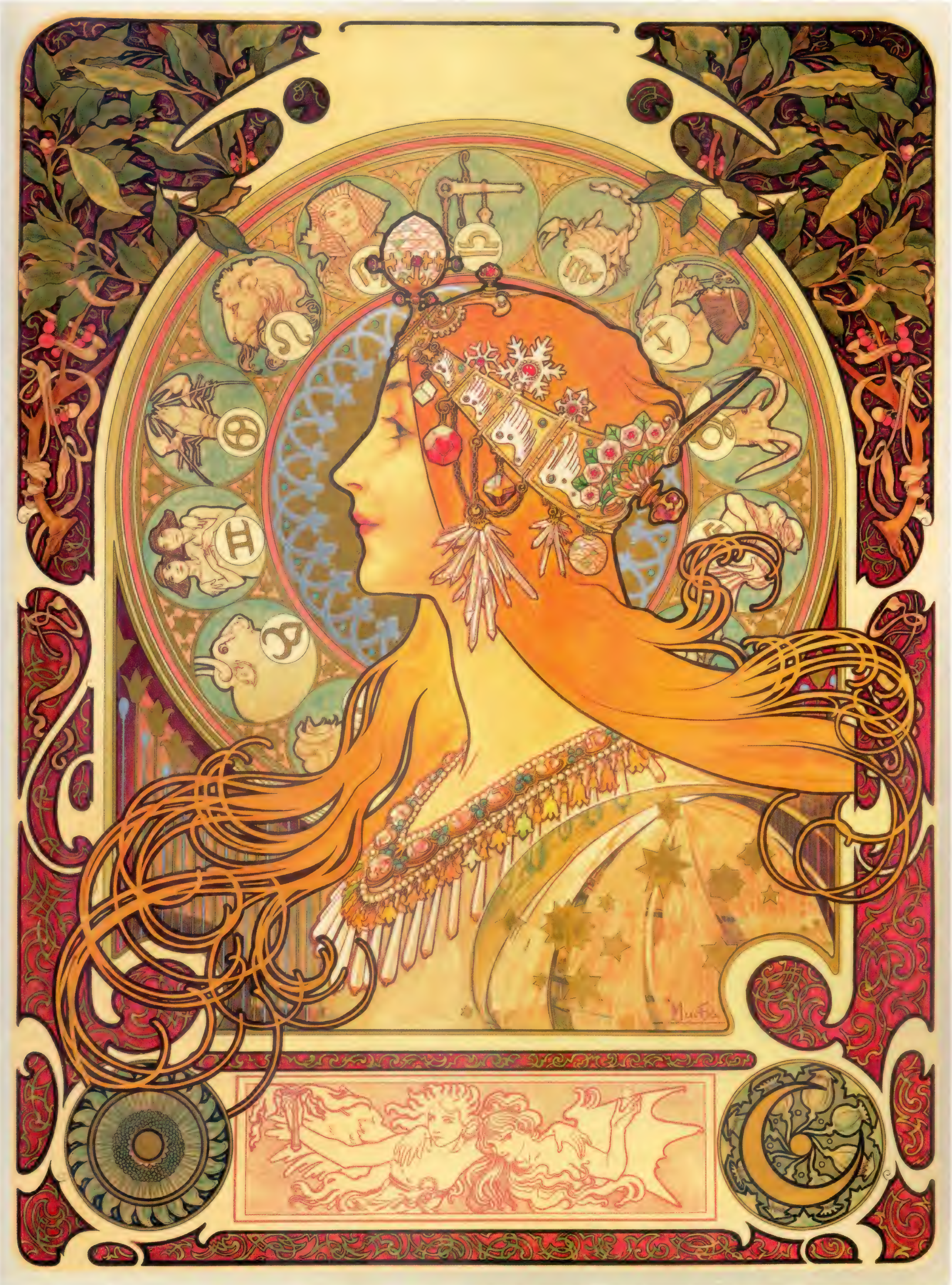
PAGE 40
The Byzantine Heads: Brunette, 1897
Colour lithograph, 34.5 x 28 cm / 13⅝ x 11 in.

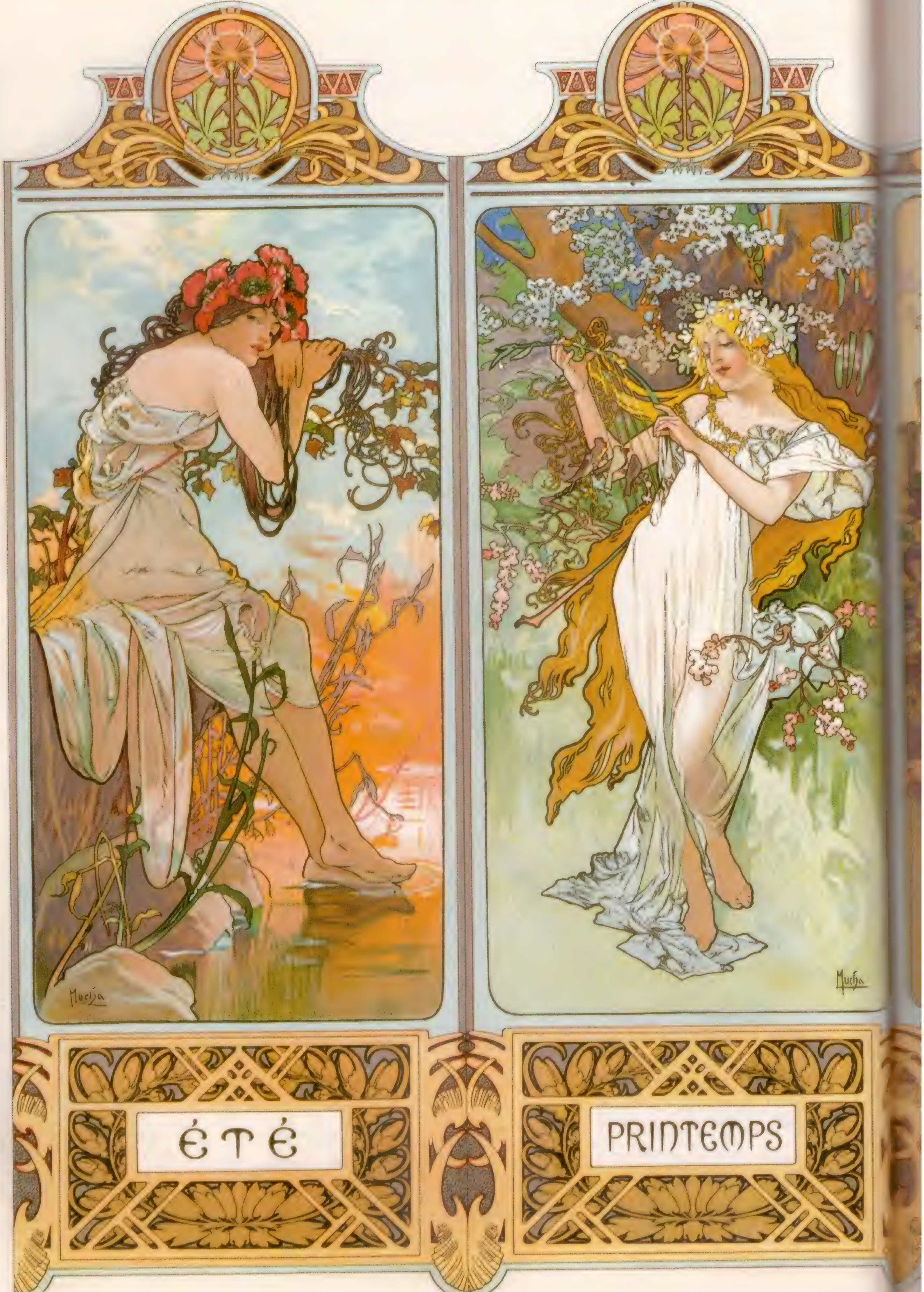
PAGE 41
The Byzantine Heads: Blonde, 1897
Colour lithograph, 34.5 x 28 cm / 13⅝ x 11 in.

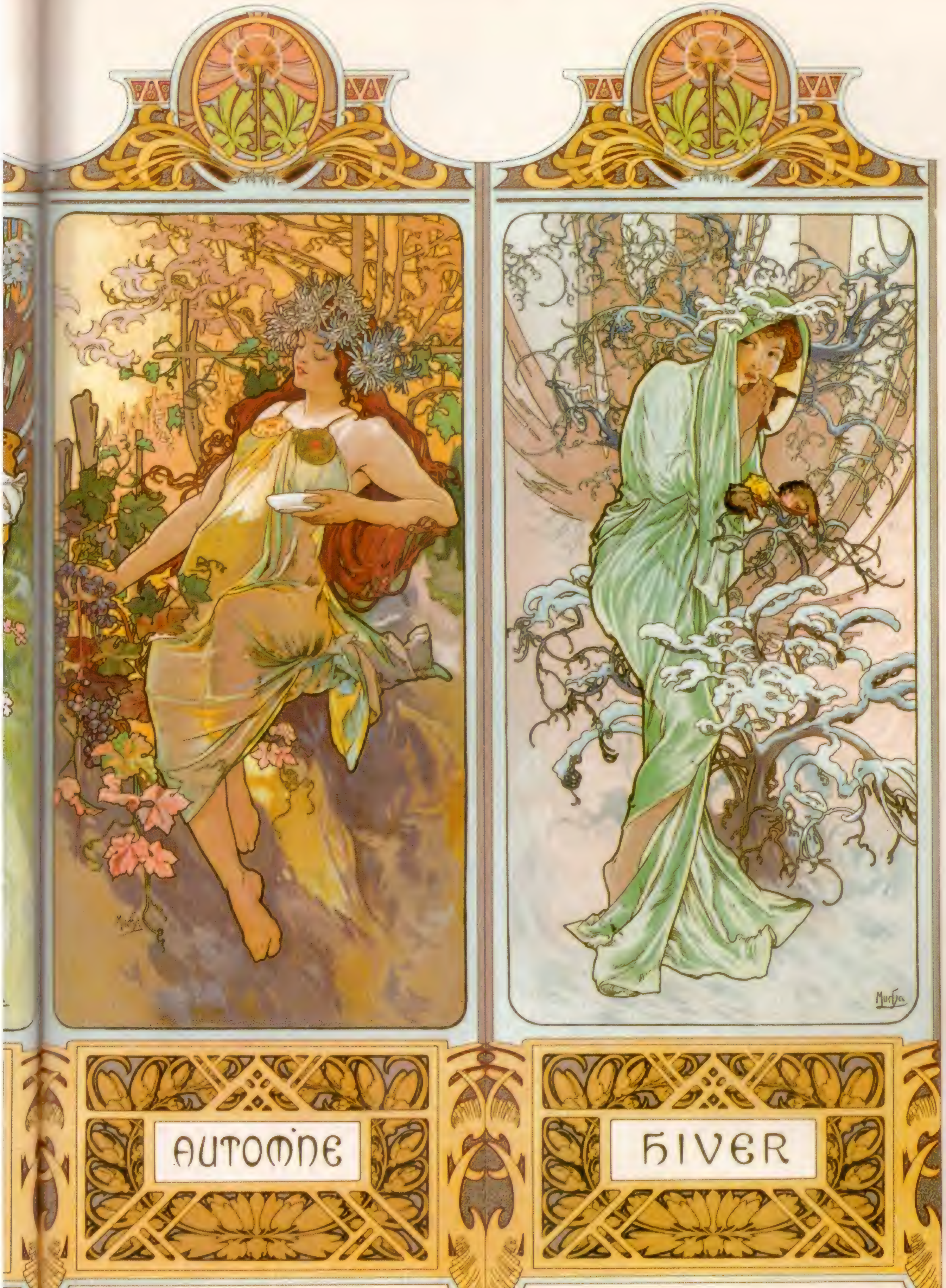
The pair of decorative panels presented here show the profiles of two women with luxurious hair ornaments set in circular frames in the style of Byzantine portraits. The exquisite pattern surrounding the circular frames simulates lacework, a decorative element familiar in Moravian craftwork.

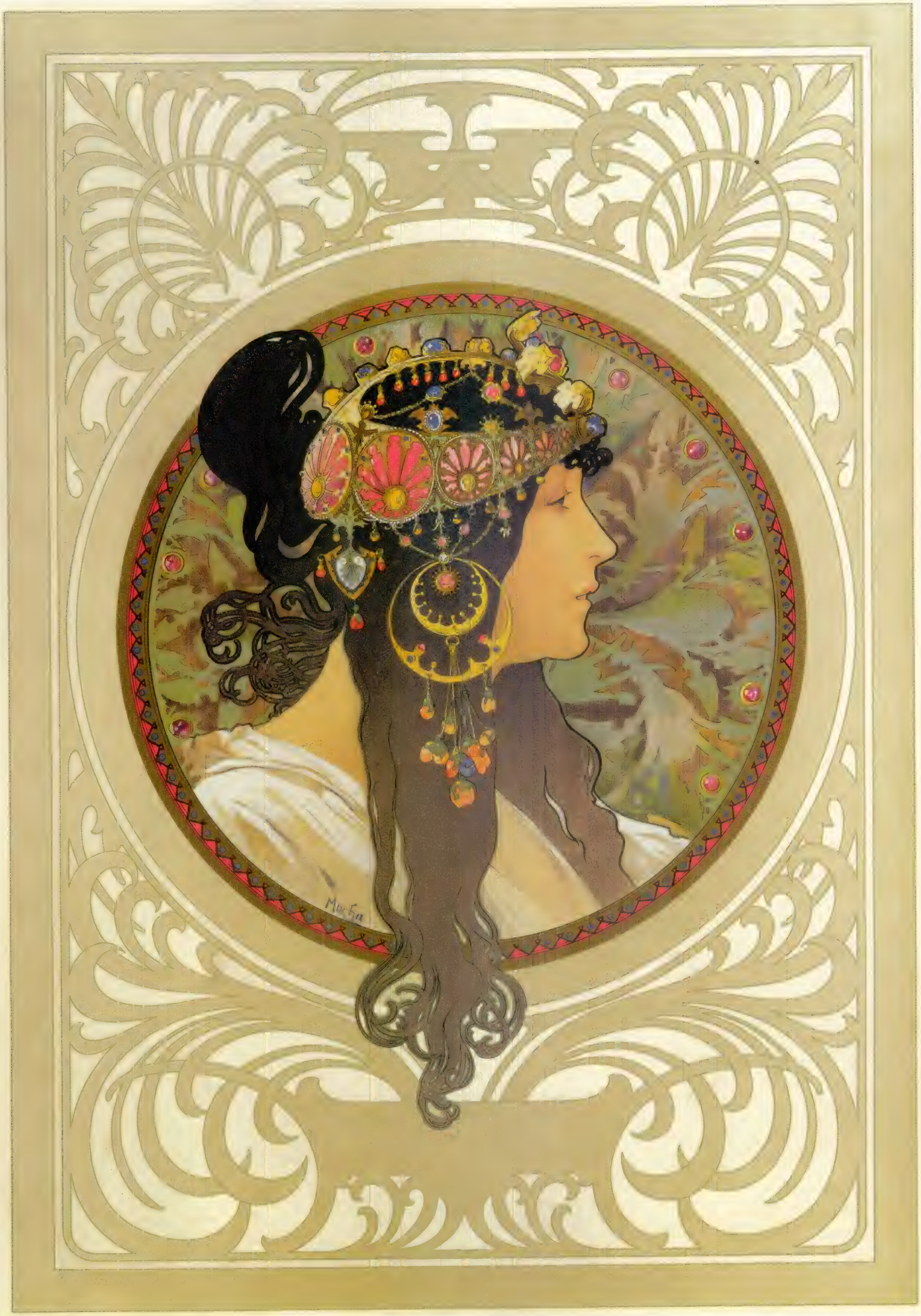
Zodiac, 1896
Colour lithograph, 65.7 x 48.2 cm / 25⅞ x 19 in.

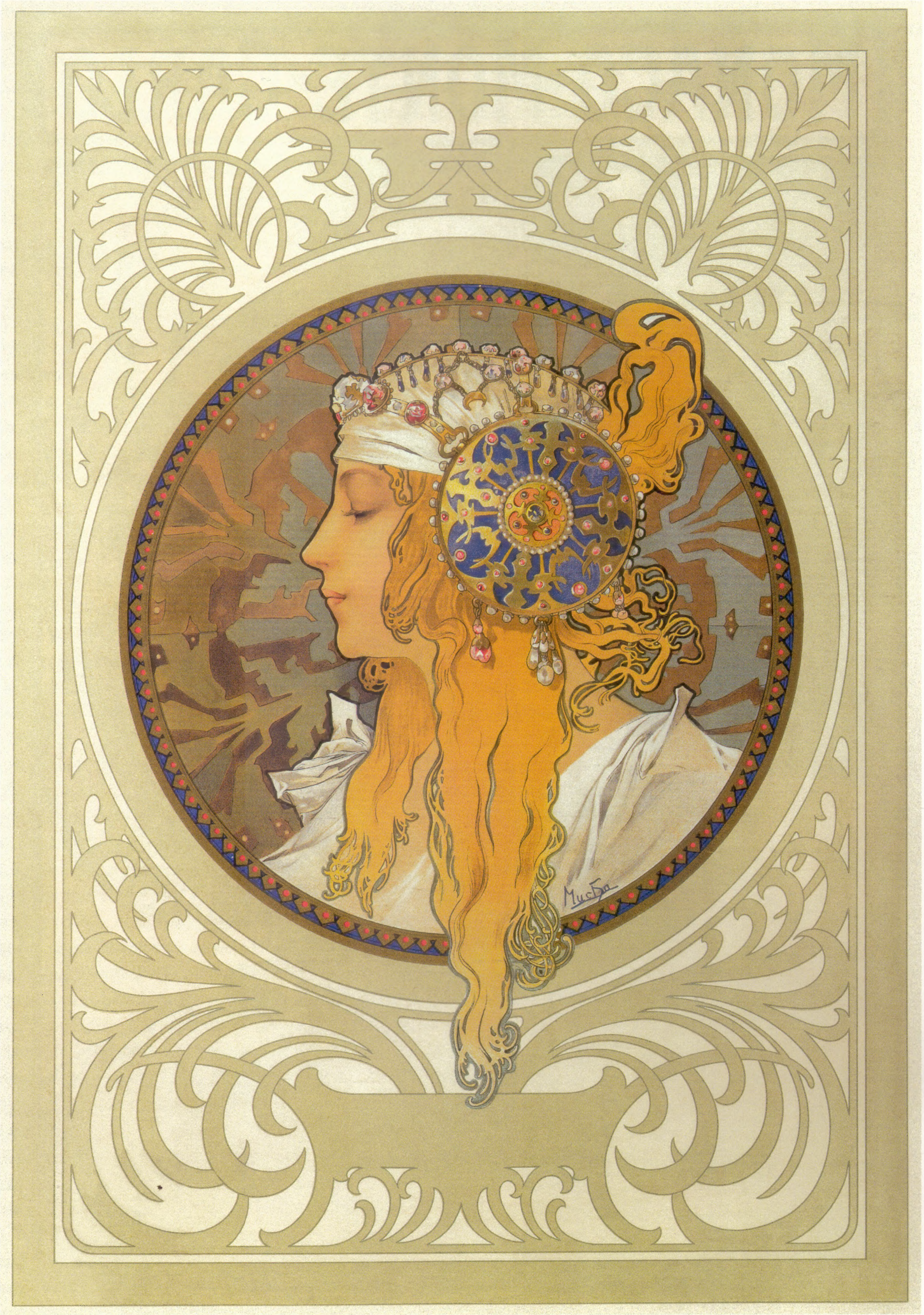
One of Mucha's most popular posters, *Zodiac* features the striking profile of a majestic woman, whose regal bearing is emphasised by elaborate jewellery. The twelve signs of the zodiac are incorporated in the circular motif in the background. This design was originally made as a company calendar for Champenois but its distribution rights were bought by *La Plume*'s editor Léon Deschamps to sell as a calendar and a decorative panel under the name of his magazine.

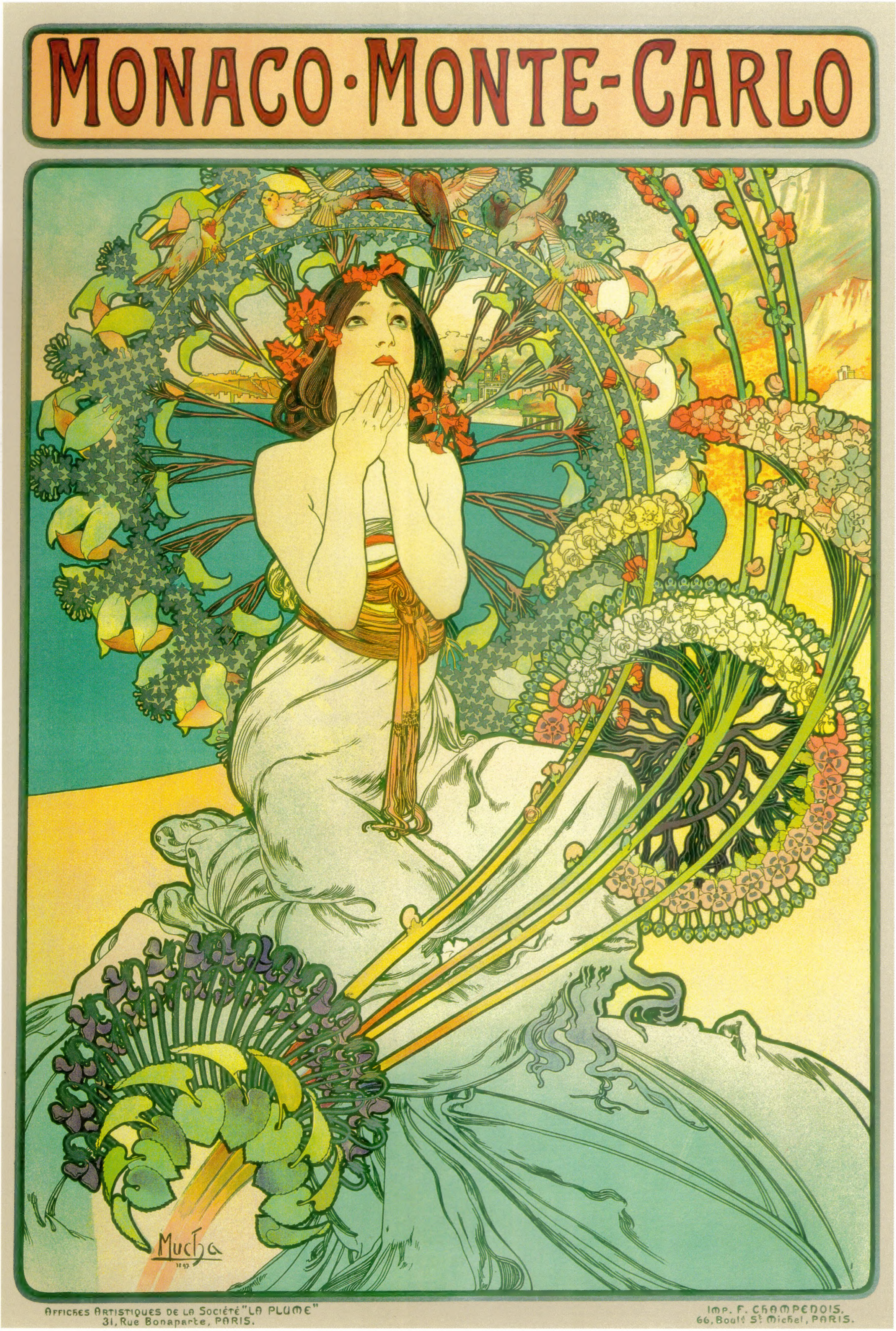



Mucha
ÉTÉ
Mucha
PRINTEMPS


AUTOMNE
HIVER
Mucha


Mucha




MONACO·MONTE-CARLO
Mucha
1897
AFFICHES ARTISTIQUES DE LA SOCIÉTÉ "LA PLUME"
31, Rue Bonaparte, PARIS.
IMP. F. CHAMPENOIS.
66, Boulᵈ Sᵗ Michel, PARIS.

seasons (pp. 38–39). This series proved to be so popular that the same subject was represented in new designs made in 1897 and 1900. *The Seasons* was followed by other popular series such as *The Flowers* (pp. 44–45), *The Arts* (1898), *The Times of the Day* (1899), *Precious Stones* (1900) and *The Moon and the Stars* (1902). Mucha also designed decorative panels as pairs or as singles, for example, *The Byzantine Heads* (pp. 40, 41) and *Rêverie* (p. 4) respectively.

Between 1896 and 1904 Mucha produced well over 100 poster designs for Champenois. Many of them were reproduced in different editions (e.g. on vellum, Japanese paper and satin for the more affluent collectors) and formats (e.g. smaller sizes, as a single sheet incorporating all panels in an ornamental frame), as well as being reformatted as calendars and postcards. It was this large body of graphic output that established Mucha's fame as a leading exponent of Art Nouveau, the international decorative style spreading across Europe and the United States by 1900.

However, Mucha's view of art stands in some contrast with his widely recognised role as an Art Nouveau artist. According to his son and biographer Jiří Mucha (1915–1991), Mucha was quite indifferent to the Art Nouveau movement and the work of his contemporaries: "What is it, new art (*art nouveau*)? … Art can never be new," Mucha would say when asked about it. To him, art was eternal and had nothing to do with "passing fashions"; in this respect he was also critical of the trend of "art for art's sake", which was, in his view, primarily concerned with the pursuit of "new" styles, ignoring the content – the artist's message. Nevertheless, Mucha's rise as a major artist was without question closely entwined with the development of the Parisian art scene in the second half of the 1890s.

In the same year as Mucha's emergence as a poster artist in 1895, German-born art dealer Siegfried Bing (1838–1905) opened a gallery in Paris called L'Art Nouveau. Having pioneered the introduction of Japanese art to the West in the 1870s, Bing was a leading advocate of Japonisme. With this new enterprise, he aspired to present new paths to contemporary art and design, bringing together the arts of East and West and breaking down the boundary between fine and decorative arts. He promoted works by artists who shared his vision, including Henry van de Velde (1863–1957), Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848–1933), Émile Gallé (1846–1904), René Lalique (1860–1945), Georges de Feure (1868–1943) and the Nabis.

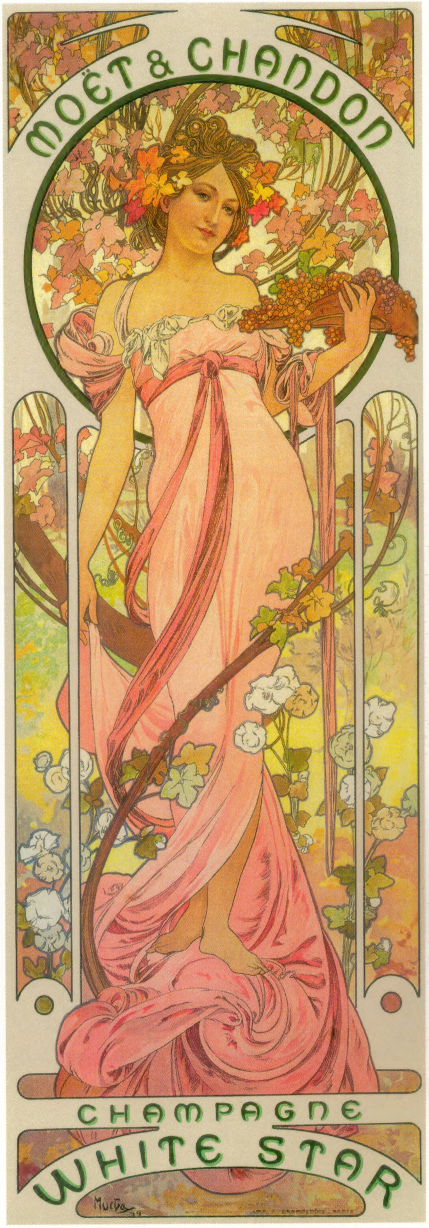
With the success of Bing's business, his gallery became an influential centre of the new artistic style, putting the term 'Art Nouveau' into circulation and giving the name to the new trend. Although Mucha never worked with Bing, he was friendly with Bing's associates, and, considering his stylistic affinity with these artists (e.g. whiplash curves, bold outlines and decorative motifs taken from flowers and plants), it is readily conceivable that in the public's mind, Mucha was associated with this 'Art Nouveau' school.

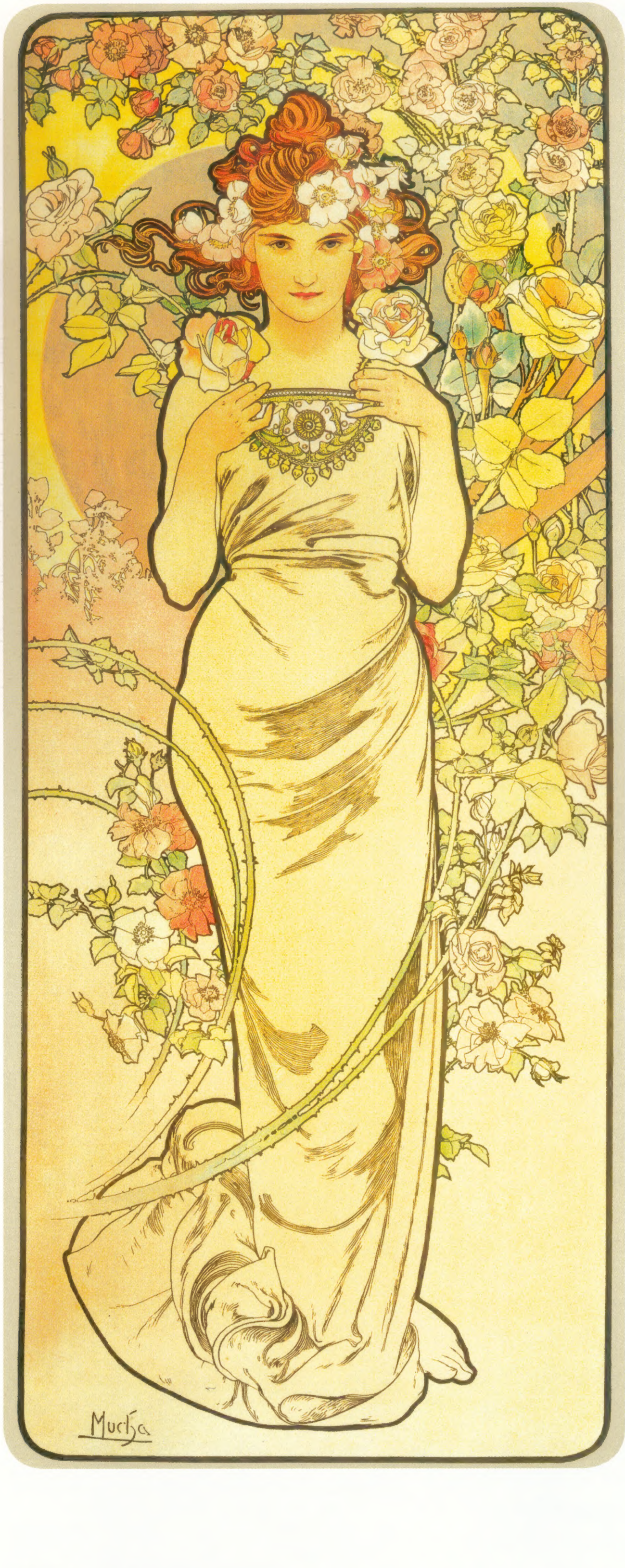
The emerging Art Nouveau style succeeded in reaching a wider audience through reproductions that appeared in art magazines, which were becoming more numerous and in which graphic arts began to take centre stage. Founded by the poet and novelist Léon Deschamps (1864–1899) in 1889, *La Plume* was particularly well known for its support for graphic arts, with one issue in 1893 dedicated to the history of the poster. In 1894 Deschamps opened an exhibition space, Salon des Cent, within the magazine's publishing premises in order to showcase works by those artists associated with *La Plume*, including Chéret, Grasset, Toulouse-Lautrec, de Feure, the Nabis and Paul Berthon (1872–1909), many of whom overlapped with Bing's circle.

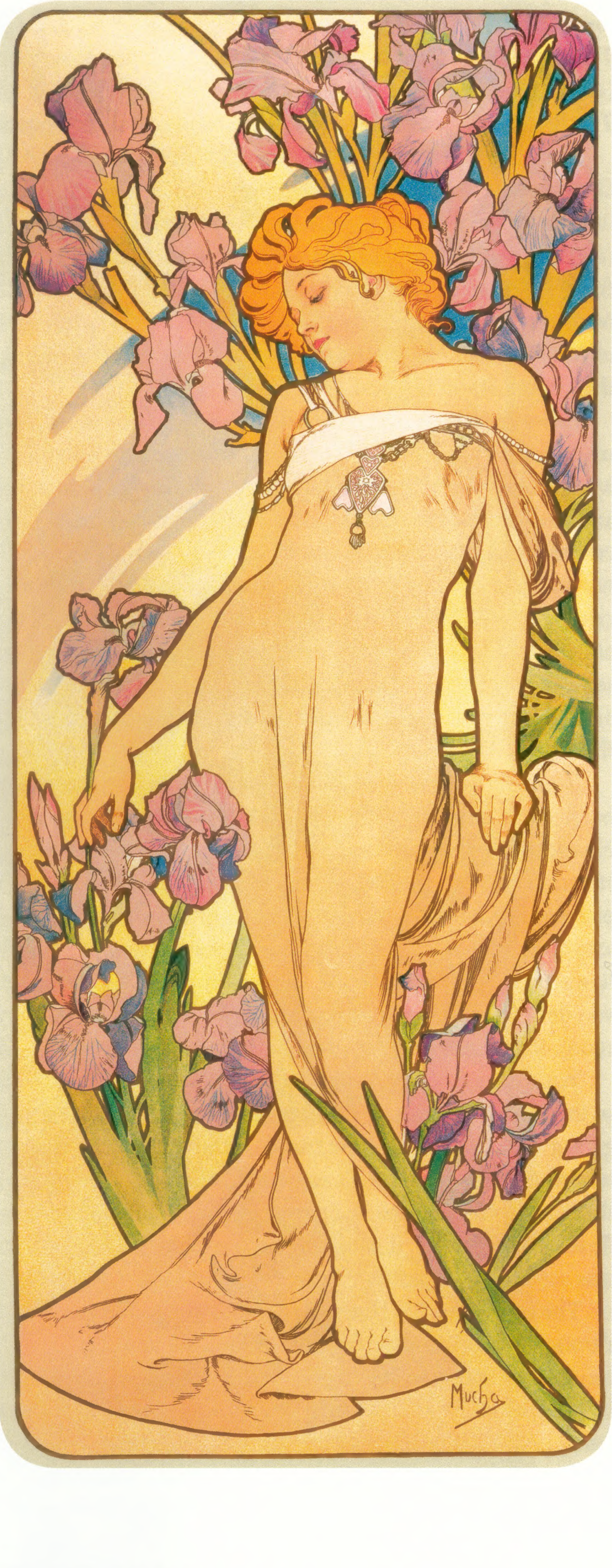
Monaco • Monte-Carlo, 1897
Colour lithograph, 108 x 74.5 cm / 42½ x 29⅜ in.

Moët & Chandon:
Champagne White Star, 1899
Colour lithograph, 60 x 20 cm / 23⅝ x 7⅞ in.

In this design, the aroma of champagne is symbolised by the figure of a beautiful woman holding a plate of grapes, intertwined with flowers and swirling vine tendrils.







The Flowers: Rose, 1898
Colour lithograph, 103.5 x 43.3 cm / 40¾ x 17 in.

The Flowers: Iris, 1898
Colour lithograph, 103.5 x 43.3 cm / 40¾ x 17 in.